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# Programs and Policies of Political Action of American Trade Unions, 1828-1928

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THE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES OF POLITICAL  
ACTION OF AMERICAN TRADE UNIONS  
1828 - 1928

BY  
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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## INTRODUCTION

This study grew out of a desire to know more regarding the political programs and policies of American unionism in its struggle for recognition as a voting power. It represents a new approach and interpretation of this movement, based upon manuscripts, newspapers, pamphlets, and books in the political, economic, and related fields. It traces the growth of labor's entrance into politics from its origin in the late 1820's to the election of Herbert Hoover as President of the United States in 1928.

I have approached the subject from each successive presidential election in those one hundred years. The study presents the economic and social background to labor's demands at each national election. It deals with the political influence exerted on a national scope, through local independent parties, national independent parties, and through party endorsements.

I am indebted to many for help in preparing this thesis. Numerous libraries and historical societies have made available to me their collections of manuscripts, newspapers, pamphlets, and books. I wish to thank the staff at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, at Madison, for their kindness in allowing me full use of their countless volumes of newspapers and manuscripts. I wish to thank the University of Wisconsin Library for

its help and aid. I thank the staffs of the John Crerar Library, the Newberry Library, the Chicago Historical Society, and the McCormick Historical Association of Northwestern University, all of this city, for their cooperation.

A special thanks to the University of Chicago Library for allowing me unlimited use of its very fine collection of newspapers.

I am indebted to Dr. Charles Anrod for his excellent advice and guidance. I am also indebted to my wife for her painstaking care in reading this paper and offering valuable advice for improvement.

I am, as the author, solely responsible for all errors and opinions expressed in this paper.

CHAPTER I  
EARLY ORGANIZATIONS

1828

1. PHILADELPHIA DEVELOPMENT

In Philadelphia, in 1827, the workingmen united and formed The Mechanics Union of Trade Association. This organization was strongly aware of the economic and social injustices existing in their city. Through primarily intended to be a workers economic organization, the need for these reforms inspired men to strive for results through the medium of political action. So, in July of 1828, there was formed in Philadelphia the first Workingmens Party of the new Republic. Political action was immediately endorsed. It was decided to call "three district meetings, one in the city, one in the Northern Liberties, and one in Southwark".<sup>1</sup> These meetings started the new party on its way. The meetings themselves met with a varying degree of success; the one in the city having the least resistance. The other two meetings had trouble with professional politicians endeavoring to get control. They were the party's toughest foe. The formation of a suitable platform was the next obstacle. The committee finally selected the following ten planks:

1. A ten hour day
2. Free tax supported schools
3. Abolishment of imprisonment for debt
4. Enact a Mechanics Lien Law

1. Mechanics Free Press, August 2, 1828

5. Alteration or abolition of the militia system
6. Banning of chartered monopolies, banking systems and lotteries
7. Alleviation of the conspiracy law against trade unions
8. Abrogation of prison contract labor
9. Payment of adequate fees for juror and witnesses
10. Reduction of the salaries of public officials

The plank for a ten hour day was met with violent opposition. It was considered radical. The people still thought in the old concept of working from "sun up to sun down". The workers had "turn-outs" in the years previous to the formation of the party, but had met with little or no success, so now they were trying for a shorter working day by political action.

Universal education was the primary goal of the worker. He realized that with proper education his children would not be relegated to the same class for the rest of their lives. There was in existence private elementary schools, but they were too costly for a poor laborer to send his children. Charity schools were available to the commoner's children, but they existed in a taint of pauperism, and inadequate instructors. The workers felt that if the masses remained ignorant, misrule and anarchy would result. The mechanic rallied his fellows around him to establish a free school, tax supported, so as to preserve the rights and liberties the new nation offered him. The laborer insisted that education is "the rock on which the temple of moral freedom and independence is founded; any other foundation than this will prove inadequate...our government is a republic, our education should be equally so."<sup>2</sup> This reform was not met with universal approval. The National Gazette, the rich mans press, was against reform

2. Ibid. October 2, 1830

stating,

the peasant must labor during those hours of the day which his wealthy neighbor can give to the abstract culture of his mind; otherwise the world wouldn't yield enough for the subsistence of all. <sup>3</sup>

The workers, in their organ the Mechanics Free Press, argued that if the people are allowed to remain uneducated, "their liberties are subverted and tyrannical ambition has never failed to take advantage of these helpless conditions."<sup>4</sup> "Let the productive classes unite then, for the preservation of their free institutions and...preserve our liberties from danger of foreign invasion or domestic infringement."<sup>5</sup> However, the wealthy still contended that tax supported schools "would be a compulsory application of the means of the richer, for the direct use of the poorer classes and this they felt was an injustice."<sup>6</sup> In fact, they were quick to inform the poorer class "that they would themselves feel the evil of direct taxation."<sup>7</sup> The National Gazette, finally realizing the futility of its attack, sarcastically stated that the reason the poorer classes didn't use the common schools now in existence was "they prefer to use their offsprings at home, or consign tme to manufactories" rather than educate them.<sup>8</sup> The worker was quick to reply, "the rich and the professional orders are averse to the instruction of the poor, because they perceive that its effects must, in a degree, affect their own high standing in society."<sup>9</sup>

3. National Gazette July 10, 1830

7. Ibid Aug 28, 1830

4. Mechanics Free Press Apr. 17, 1830

8. Ibid, Aug. 28, 1830

5. Ibid

9. Enquirer, June 11, 1831

6. National Gazette Aug. 19, 1830



4

As to the abolition of imprisonment for debt, the worker noted that the law did apply to all classes, but very rarely was the wealthy class affected by its punishment. The Mechanics Free Press held, " a law that makes poverty a crime, and a poor man a felon... is not only cruel and oppressive, but absurd and revolting."<sup>10</sup> A man could be imprisoned for owing as little as six dollars. This prompted the remark,"the abolition of imprisonment for debt, a relic of those ages when the rights of man were unknown...is with us a desirable object."<sup>11</sup> This plank of the laboring mans platform met with resistance from the wealthy class because they were aware of the perverted manner in which the law was being used. Also, the filthy and inadequate prisons were revolting to both rich and poor.

Labor's inferior bargaining power caused it to ask for privileges over and above those granted to capitalists. One of these demands was for a mechanics lien law. This was to secure the wage earner as a creditor. This plank was adopted by the existing old parties, for they realized that it was a normal demand, and one that the mechanic was duly entitled to.

The compulsory service in the militia affected the daily life of every workingman. It was true that this system was applicable to all classes, but like the debtors law, fell the heaviest upon the worker. If the worker failed to appear for drills he could be fined, and if he couldn't afford the fine, he would be imprisoned.

10. Mechanics Free Press, July 5, 1830

11. Mechanics Free Press, Utica, New York Apr. 24, 1830

The richer men usually paid the fine for not drilling, and therefore dispensed with the burden of the militia system. The workers were urged to campaign vigorously to elect a man who would take steps "to modify the present oppressive militia system, which annually squanders your wealth and toil in useless riot and extravagance."<sup>12</sup> This plank was agreed upon by all classes of society, as it inconvenienced them all in some manner.

Paper money, backed only by credit, was flooding the new Republic. This the workers wanted stopped and abolished. Those banks, issueing the money, had been chartered by the states, and had no gold to back it up. Each one issued as much money as it deemed necessary. This obviously was an unsound policy, and one that needed abrogation. Monopolies were given by the states through the medium of charters. The worker acknowledged that "occasions may arise in which individuals should be secured by charters," but they claimed, "accurate examination will...show these to be very few, and rather to be considered as alarming incidents, than the harbinger of good."<sup>13</sup> They contended that, "chartered monopolies make a few wealthy, to the disadvantage and misery of the mass of people."<sup>14</sup> The lottery system was spoken of "as one of the six means whereby the laborer has been defrauded of the work of his hands."<sup>15</sup> The worker wanted lott-eries abolished completely, "whether instituted for the building of churches or the cutting of canals."<sup>16</sup> The sale of lottery tickets to children as well as to men was profitable to the

12. Mechanics Free Press Sept. 25, 1830

13. Ibid, Feb. 21, 1829

14. Ibid, Oct. 2, 1830

15. Ibid, Aug. 26, 1829

16. Ibid, Sept. 25, 1830

sellers, but a means of misery and pauperism to the gamblers.

Trade unions couldn't take any political action because of the conspiracy prosecution against them. They were considered "conspiracies in restraint of trade". This was a phase of the common law. In past years, conspiracy cases had been handled by the courts and in the majority of the cases the trade unions had been defeated. Unions wanted the right to bargain collectively for economic gains, but as long as the conspiracy charge was applicable, little chance of that appeared likely.

The competition from prison labor was severe to the tradesman. With the advent of highways and canals as faster ways of transportation, this competition became more evident. It was impossible for a tradesman to turn out his finished product as cheap as those done by prison labor. This was hurting the economy of the tradesman's families, as well as his own productive future. The worker endeavored to remedy this situation through political action.

The wage earners selected for jury duty, and those who were witnesses, received paltry fees for their services. They were losing a day's work, or in some cases much more than that. They felt that this was an injustice when their fee was compared with that of the professional men involved. They were in favor of a balancing of the fees, so as to show more parity.

The reduction of the salaries of public officials was a plank that appealed to the poorer class of people. They felt that they were being financially exploited and realizing they could never attain the height of a public official, wanted these

excessive salaries reduced.

The Workingmans Party did not run its own candidates at first. It preferred to interregate the candidates nominated, and to ascertain their opinions upon the issues pertinent to the worker. They ran eight candidates on an independent ticket when they found that none of the candidates running agreed with their issued. These eight men only polled from 229 to 539 votes each, but the men that the party had endorsed were swept in with the Jackson ticket. This gave the Workingmens Party a total of twenty-one friends in the city administration. "The results has been equal to our most sanguine expectations; yet, it may not be equally as satisfactory to our friends."<sup>17</sup> "So commented the Mechanics Free Press.

After the success in the first year of party activity, the Workingmans Pary went to work on a city wide campaign of organization. They felt that these clubs would "diffuse constitutional, legal, and political knowledge among working people."<sup>18</sup> Nominations for the year of 1829 were made at the different meetings, but not without considerable trouble. Just prior to the election, a meeting was broken up by a party of 150 laborers "employed by the City Commissioners."<sup>19</sup> It was in this year, regardless of all methods of attacks employed by the other two parties, that the Workingmans Party secured the balance of power. They elected twenty of their own candidates, plus some

17. Ibid Oct. 18, 1828

18. Ibid Nov. 1, 1828

19. Ibid Oct. 10, 1829

of the other men they had endorsed, who ran on either the Federalist or Jackson ticket. "Workingmen have made so formidable an attack upon the ranks of both the political parties, as to have possessed themselves pretty nearly of what may be called the balance of local power." So spoke the Free Trade Advocate.<sup>20</sup> The Mechanics Free Press, which had so gallantly carried the banner of the laborer through the election, stated in an editorial: "The balance of power has at length got into the hands of the working people, where it properly belongs, and it will be used in the future, for the general weal." <sup>21</sup>

Immediately after the election, the workingmen set themselves to the task of educating their voters. They also fostered state wide political solidarity for all workingmen. Cities throughout Pennsylvania were organizing their laboring class, and taking steps toward political action. However, back in Philadelphia, as the days of the 1830 election neared, the workers were the victims of viscious assaults by the newspapers. They were accused of agrarianism and of being "anti-religious".<sup>22</sup> A malicious campaign was maintained up to the eve of the election. It had its desired effect, the Democratic party, with Jackson as its watchword swept into office, and the workingmen were crushed in its wake. A few of their endorsed candidates went along with the slide, but the independent ones were crushed into defeat. The party lost its balance of power, and this meant defeat. This was the "swan song"

20. Free Trade Advocate, Nov. 14, 1829

21. Mechanics Free Press, Oct. 17, 1829

22. American Sentinel, Oct. 11, 1830

of the party in Philadelphia.

Contrary to popular thought, the labor party didn't fail in Philadelphia because of industrial prosperity, for times didn't improve until 1834, nor did it fail because of legitimate internal dissention. Its failure was primarily due to a combination of political causes, namely, the workers inability to play the game of politics, and the too excellent acquaintance of the old party politicians with the tricks of the game.

The disastrous spread of cholera in Philadelphia, during the summer of 1832, put an end to any recovery of the Workingmens Party for activity in the Presidential election of that year.

## 2. NEW YORK DEVELOPMENT

The labor movement in New York began two years after the after the awakening in Philadelphia. The drive for shorter hours was the primary impetus for political action, coming after concerted action on the economic front had failed to produce the needed results. However, in New York, the workers complained of political conditions more than of economic ones. The old parties had not properly represented the working class; thus, the need for political action to enact legislation suitable to the mechanics. The first meeting of the mechanics of New York was held in April of 1829.<sup>23</sup> At this meeting, whose purpose was to oppose working more than ten hours a day, the workers resolved to take political action to obtain shorter hours. In October of that year they met and nominated their candidates for the election which was then only one week off. The Working Mens Advocate, edited by George Henry Evans, was to be the official organ, such as the Mechanics Free Press was in Philadelphia. The Working Mens Party met with considerable opposition. It had as its members too many idealists and radicals. It had Thomas Skidmore, a radical, self-educated machinist; Francis Wright, atheistical, neurotic defender of women's rights; and Robert Dale Owens, utopian advocate. These reformers tended to pull the party in different directions to suit their concepts and ideas. The most formidable outside opposition came from Tammany Hall. The "hall" had formerly controlled the vote of the working men, and they were now striving

23. Morning Courier, Apr. 23, 1829

to get it back. Eventually, some of the factions of the internally rent Working Mens party fused with Tammany Hall. Even with only a week to campaign, the working men were able to elect one of their candidates to the assembly.

The Working Mens Party of New York operated from the same platform as the Philadelphia party, except for a few local planks

Regarding the ten hour day, the party said "that ten hours well and faithfully employed is as much as an employer ought to receive for a days work; and that is as much as any artisan, mechanic, or labourer ought to give."<sup>24</sup>

On the issue of free, tax supported schools, the workers had this to remark, "the extension of the blessings of education; by an increase of our common or primary schools, and making universal provision for the instruction of the children" is to be one of our prime measures.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning a mechanics lien law, the Working Mans Advocate suggested that a "lien las for the security of every individual who shall either furnish labor or materials toward the erection, completion, or necessary repairs of any building" should be enacted.<sup>26</sup>

The injustice of the militia system was evident to the workers of New York too.

For our part, we could never see what peculiar advantage there was to peaceful citizens, in perambulating dusty streets, under a musket or performing a 100 mere showy

24. Ibid, April 25, 1829

25. Mechanics Free Press (Utica) Apr. 24, 1830

26. Workingmens Advocate, Oct. 29, 1829



evolutions, that are seldom if ever necessary in actual warfare, to the great detriment of their business and the loss of time, which can ill be spared from the work-mens necessary avocations. <sup>27</sup>

Auctions are a "monopoly which crushes the middle class and divides the people into rich and poor".<sup>28</sup> This is the basis for the workers desire of abolishing the auctions active in the city. The worker also complained that there were in circualton "more than a thousand kinds of counterfeit bank notes, from \$500. to \$1.00," and declared that "more than 100 broken banks in the past few years admonish the country to destroy banks altogether." After requesting complete banishment of banks, the workers relinquished their position, and advocated that "legislature refuse to renew existing charters, that the system be reorganized... that circulation of notes of less than \$5. or \$10. be prohibited"

The New York party also was opposed to the conspiracy doctrine restricting unions activities. It was the basic public policy underlying the doctrine "that a number of persons acting in concert or combination possess power for wrongful accomplishments, not possessed by individuals" that the workers wanted altered.<sup>31</sup>

The wage earners were delighted with their small success at the election of 1829, considering the short time they had to campaign. "We have done more than could have reasonably been expected at this election... and paved the way to future victory."

27. Mechanics Free Press, (Utica) Jan. 23, 1830

28. Annals of Wis. Academy, V.17, Secrist "Anti-Aution Movement and New York Working Mens Party", p 151

29. Working Mans Advocate, Oct. 31, 1829

30. Ibid, Oct. 31, 1829

31. Ibid, Oct. 31, 1829

So remarked the New York Working Mans Advocate.<sup>32</sup>

Preparation for the next campaign began once the business of the old one had been cleared. However, it was then that internal dissension began to arise. The various powers in the organization began to "pull strings" their way. Issac Odell, the chairman of the party was at a loss.<sup>33</sup> His two secretaries, William Tillow and Robert Owens, were going in opposite directions. The party had split. Owen's had one faction, and the other was anti-Owens. A third faction sprang up under Thomas Skidmore, called the "Agrarianist" or the original working men.<sup>34</sup> This faction finally seceded and became a rival party.

While the two factions were battling between themselves in New York city, organization activity was going on in the entire state of New York. Towns like Albany, Troy, Utica, Rochester, Syracuse, Salina, Schenectady, Ithaca, Auburn, and Batavia were awakened and aroused to action.<sup>35</sup>

Proposal that the Working Mens Parties should hold a state convention was mentioned by the different clarions of the parties. It was decided to hold the first convention at Salina, N.Y., on August 25, 1830. Here was nominated, over staunch protest of some of the cities present, Erasmus Root for Governor.<sup>36</sup> His running mate was to be General Pitcher. The Working Mans Advocate denounced the nomination of these two men as "two decided party men...who never advocated...supporting our measures".<sup>37</sup> The

32. Ibid. Nov.7,1829

33. Annals of Wisconsin Academy  
V.17 Secrist "Anti-Auction  
Movement and Working Mens  
Party of New York" pl49

34. Working Mans Advocate Jan. 7  
1830

35. Mechanics Free Press May 29.  
1830

36. Working Mans Advocate Sept.4

Democrat party met later and General Root was defeated as their nominee for Governor, which prompted him to step down from the Working Mens Party nomination taking General Pitcher with him. This threw the party into a turmoil. It had ventured out of local politics against the advice of some of its adherents, and now was to suffer a devastating defeat because of its ignorance about politics. The withdrawal of the candidates came two weeks prior to the election date, and left no time for another convention.

The Democrats swept the state and most of the cities. The Working Mens ticket faltered along behind. The Free Enquirer said "thousands of those who were the real friend of the workingmen...sided in with Tammany to keep out the Tappan party."<sup>38</sup> This was mainly an alibi, for the real truth resided in the fact that the workers had failed to stick together in their pre-election conferences and the voters didn't know which way to vote. This defeat was not the finish of activities for the party, but merely a devastating set-back.

The appearance of the workingmen in politics caused no small amount of excitement as is indicated by the remark of one of the members of the Assembly, "factionists, more dangerous than any... in the days of the French revolution," are now campaigning for votes.<sup>39</sup>

The Working Mans Party, "who in the main were workingmen, drew their support from a definite and compact area of the city

37. Ibid, Sept. 4, 1830

38. Free Enquirer, Nov. 13, 1830

39. Working Mans Advocate, Mar. 13, 1830

...while their coalition merchant drew his support from an entirely different section of the city."<sup>30</sup> This fact added to the party's success.

After that fateful election of 1830, when the three factions of the Working Mens Party had cut their collective throat, they again went their own way, refusing to merge for the common good. By the fall of 1831 the Skidmore faction had disappeared, and the anti-Owens group had amalgamated with Clay and the Republican Party. The Owen faction put up a complete ticket in the 1831 election, but it was adopted by Tammany hall and finally the faction merged with Tammany. This ended the political activities of the workingmen of New York as a unit.

The Working Mens Party had a national significance. It had spread from Philadelphia to New York and the New England States, along the Atlantic coast and then westward to Missouri.

Workingmen parties had consisted "of lawyer, merchant, physicians, and speculators under the general cognomen of workingmen"<sup>41</sup> This was true wherever the party had found any success or fame.

However, it shouldn't be assumed that this period of direct political action by trade union men was unprofitable. To the contrary, the results were beneficial. The Passage of the Mechanics Lien law in New York, the abolition of imprisonment for debt both were passed in the spring of 1831

40. Annals of Wisconsin Academy  
V. 17, Secrist "Anti-Auction  
Movement and Working Mens  
Party of New York." p 149

41. New York Spectator, Oct. 30,  
1829

because of the efforts of the Party. The noticeable increase in appropriations for educational purposes in New York is attributable to the awakening the party had caused.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, the foundation of the American free school system is, in a large measure, to be credited to the labor movement of this era.

1832 - 1836

The brief existence of the working mens parties doesn't obscure their accomplishments. They revealed that labor was emerging as a force to be reckoned with. Workers were beginning to become conscious of themselves as a separate class, whose interests were different from those of capitalists.

On December 11, 1830 a year-and-a-half after the New York party had been formed, the Working Mans Advocate proudly wrote, "many of the reforms called for by the worker are now acknowledged to be just and reasonable, and even advocated by several of the presses that hitherto supported the party in power." Thus the Advocate was summing up the most important results of the parties.

Now the workers, having taken a "flyer" in the political field decided to return to industrial or business methods to obtain their measures.

The ephemeral labor parties had been successful in winning some of their measures, so now the platform of issues demanded by labor had grown smaller.

1. Reform in the militia system
2. Shorter working day
3. Labor laws for women and children in industry
4. Extension of suffrage to those states not having it.
5. Abolition of monopolies and the present banking system

In the state of Rhode Island, the workers won their demands and suffrage was established.

As to the condition of women and children in industry, Seth Luther, the disciple for reforms in that field, said in his

Address to the Workingmen of New England:

to look at the pale and dirty and spiritless things as they pour out of the factory to their hurried meals at the sound of a bell...to see the lazy motion of their faded limbs...and their woe begone countenances, must give a pang to the feeling heart which can never be forgotten.

Regarding the need for a ten hour day, the New York Man said:

that we are now engaged in a cause which is not only of vital importance to ourself, our families and our children, but is equally interesting and important to every Mechanic in the United States and the whole world...we have been too long subjected to the odious, cruel unjust and tyrannical system which compels the operative mechanic to exhaust his physical and mental powers by excessive labor, until he has no desire but to eat and sleep and, in many cases he has no power to do either from extreme debility.<sup>43</sup>

The demands for other reforms was still evident, but the severe epidemic of cholera that attacked the Eastern section of the new Republic, and was especially devastating in the hovels of the working class, put a damper on any concerted efforts. This epidemic, plus the excitement over the national campaign, drew the interest of the worker from the local issues.

43. The Man, May 13, 1835

1836 - 1840

### 3. "WILD CAT" ERA POLITICS

The trade unions now had partially forgotten about using politics to gain their objectives, and were using pragmatic, opportunistic measures, accompanied by a swelling of their ranks. The boom years of "wild cat" prosperity was at hand and the trade unions were increasing every day. However, the trade unions were guarding against their being drawn into political parties. They wanted no part of that venture.

Opposition to unions was now coming from a new faction, employers organizations. The employers had decided to protect themselves "against the destructive influence of the trade Union Society," and declared that they would "not employ any man who is known to be a member of that or any other society which has for its object the dictation of terms or prices for which a worker shall engage himself."<sup>44</sup> This was the use of the now infamous "blacklist" against the trade unions. The Man said, "workingmen have been discharged...custom has been withdrawn...wages have been withheld from honest industry, because it couldn't submit to mental slavery."<sup>45</sup> The Man also stated, "labour is menaced, he is discharged if he will not vote in conformity with the will of his employer."<sup>46</sup>

The National Trade Union was established in August of 1834.

44. New York Courier and Enquirer, Mar. 26, 1836

45. New York Man, Apr. 9, 1834

46. Ibid, June 18, 1834



It embodied all of the locals and central trade unions in the major cities. It shunned political action and was a mere clearing house for the members. It disappeared with the crash of 1837.

The Boot and Shoemakers Trade Union of New York entered directly into politics by joining the Equal Rights Party; the Anti-Monopoly and progressive off-shoot of Tammany Hall. This marked the first time that any trade union had entered politics directly.<sup>47</sup>

The Democratic party adopted the platform of the laboring man, and in doing so, insured his support for the subsequent election of Martin Van Buren.

The demands of Labor in this era were of a different nature in instances, than those of the earlier labor parties.

1. Higher wages
2. Ten hour day
3. Reforms for children and women in labor
4. Laws to alter present systems of disposing of public lands
5. A Protective tariff
6. Extend and improve educational facilities
7. Enact anti-monopoly legislation

The trade unions were striving to get higher wages, for this was a time of high prices and prosperity.

In 1834, the trades had received a ten hour day, but now the government workers wanted the ten hour day extended to them.

The Federal government had been selling the public land, The worker felt it should be giving the land free to anyone who would settle on it, and work it.

47. New York Democrat Nov. 8, 1836

The laborer was feeling the competition of products, made in lands other than his own nation. To combat this new evil, he felt that a protective tariff should be enacted which would levy high duties on all imports which were also made in this country. This would foster the sale of American-made goods, and diminish the foreign competition.

The efforts of the trade unionist in Philadelphia were finally recognized in the establishment of a public school system in that city, in 1834. Violent opposition and protest by the trade unionist had also caused the enactment of reforms in the contracts of prison labor. In Boston, a new law regarding imprisonment for debt was enacted, "no person shall be imprisoned on mesne process for any debt--unless the plaintiff shall swear that he believes the defendant intends to leave the state to avoid payment."<sup>48</sup>

The Equal Rights Party was the only party in existence at the time with any recognized membership of workingmen. There was a need for this party as The Man advises "Those who do the work and fight the battles; who produce the necessities and comforts of life; who till the earth or dig for its treasures; who build the houses and the ships; all these should combine their efforts, should form Unions, Political Unions. They should not form or attach themselves to political parties. ..It is because every workingman has not been a politician that bad legislation has taken place."<sup>49</sup>

48. Boston Republican, Mar. 5, 1834

49. Ibid Feb. 18, 1834

The clarion goes on to say:

Now is the time for the producer of wealth to come forward and to maintain their principles ...Education demands the serious attention of every man who desires the prosperity of his yet free and happy country...Next to education the banking system deserves your serious study and investigation...Imprisonment for debt is another subject of vital importance which claims your careful and calm decision.<sup>50</sup>

A little later, The Man wrote "the evil evils which oppress the Useful classes who compose the Trade Unions are political; consequently, the remedy for those evils must be political, but with party politics the workingman will not meddle", thus again endorsing the individual political action of the unions in the Equal Rights Party.<sup>51</sup> This party was successful in preventing Tammany from gaining control of the legislature. In the mayor-ality election of 1836 in New York city, the workmen in the Equal Rights party supported their own candidates, and thus insured a victory for the Whigs over Tammany. By withdrawing its support from the Democratic Party, the workingman had done more than insure the election of the Whigs, they had taught both parties that labor could not be dismissed in political affairs; at least not in its boom years.<sup>52</sup>

50. Ibid. April 29, 1834

51. Ibid. June 14, 1834

52. New York Democrat, November 10, 1836

## 4. DEPRESSION POLITICS

The panic of 1837 dealt trade unionism a devastating blow. Production came almost to a standstill, and thousands of workers were thrown out of work. Employer organizations took full advantage of this depression to break the unions. Wages of the men still employed were cut from 30 to 50 per cent.

The business method of obtaining what the craft unions desired for the democratic life of a worker had barely gotten under way when the panic and subsequent depression arrested and blighted all union activities. Those unions that the employer organizations didn't break failed because their reserve funds were inadequate to ride out the depression.

The only remaining political party that was patronized on a wholesale basis by the worker was the Equal Right Party. This party had been successful in 1837 in defeating the once unbeatable Tammany Hall in the New York City elections. However, this was the apex of their action. It was now that Tammany made its move. It accepted five of the Equal Rights Party candidates as its own, practically engulfed their demands, ousted the aristocracy factions that it had, and began a concerted drive to regain the labouring vote.

The demands of a laboring faction that had only one interest, that being the means by which the worker could adequately

feed and clothe his family, was aimed at the abolishment of monopolies.<sup>53</sup>

1. Abolish all monopolies
2. Improve existing educational facilities
3. Curb prison labor
4. Improve conditions of the poor
5. The slavery question
6. Higher protective tariff
7. Distribution of public lands

It can be readily recognized that all of these demands had to do with the welfare of the laborer immediately. He was looking for the solution to the depression he was in, and he wanted it soon.

Now that the worker had free time, something he never had while he was fully employed, he realized the need for a constantly increasing and improving of educational facilities. He felt that if his children were educated wisely, a recurrence of this great disaster could be avoided.

A necessary curb on prison contract labor would be one of the measures by which the laboring man could regain his employment. If the prison labor was curbed so as to refrain from putting its products on the open market, it would cause a shortage of some products with the result of an increase in employment at those places making the product in competition with prison labor. This the worker was in favor of.

The slavery question made its first appearance in the new republic. It was brought up by the worker because he felt that the slaves were hampering his chances of regaining employment, especially in those towns bordering on the South.

53. New York Democrat, Nov. 20, 1839

A high protective tariff would serve as a protection against the competition from abroad, which the American producer couldn't stand at this time.

The workers who had the finances were migrating to the West in search of the public lands so they could grow their subsistence.

The drive by the workers in 1836 for a ten hour day for the employees of the government met with success in 1840, when President Van Buren signed the Act.<sup>54</sup>

It must be noted with significance that had care been paid to the demands of the Workingmens Party from 1828 to 1832, many of the evil results of unregulated banking would have been avoided, and the panic of 1837 would have lessened considerably its destruction, if not completely prevented. Now the fears of the workers had come true. The same men who were responsible for this suffering, were now sending workers home from their jobs, empty-handed.

54. New Yorker, March 31, 1840

## CHAPTER II

### HUMANITARIANISM AND UTOPIANISM

#### 1844 - 1848

#### 1. OWENISM AND FOURIERISM

This was an era of humanitarianism and socialism. Both philosophies were being tried in the nation. It was surmised that these orders could offer a solution out of the increasing difficulties and limitations the worker met in the wage system. This was the time of the great talkers, the "hot-air" era of utopians.

"The sun with its life giving heat had set", and labor began " to see the cold and distant stars."<sup>55</sup>

Great thinkers like Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and George Evans held sway.

Robert Owens, who had been instrumental in the formation of the Working Mens Party of New York and later headed one of its factions, scheme of communistic societies flowered briefly during the New Harmony days of the mid-1820's. However, by the depression of 1837 they had collapsed completely. Owenism had failed but not all of its adherents were willing to admit defeat, and after the panic subsided, they formed societies in numerous places. This new movement made little headway, but the idea remained and found its expression in the Charles Fourier program of Association.

55. Perlman, Selig History of Trade Unionism in the United States, p29

Although Fourier never came to America, his books had influenced prominent Americans. Alfred Brisbane was his first disciple. Brisbane wrote books on Fourier writings and spread the philosophy to Americans in that style. Mr. Brisbane boasted, "In all the principle towns and many of the smaller ones, the people are taking up the subject with the greatest of enthusiasm and energy--forming societies for the dissemination of the doctrines and organizing small associations."<sup>56</sup>

Horace Greeley, the founder of the New York Tribune, was a convert of Brisbane, and he opened up the columns of his paper to Brisbane commentaries.

The basic difference between Fourier and Owens was that the latter abolished individual property rights, while the former preserved them. Another difference was that Owen believed industrial organization could contribute to human progress, while Fourier felt that industrialization was evil, and only "agrarian" handicraft economy was the solution.<sup>57</sup>

Robert Owens philosophy was characterized by paternalism, concentration of authority, and the idea of a community of goods. Fourier and his fundamentalist had little sympathy for Owen. Fourier wrote that Owen's plan for "a community of goods is so pitiful that it is not worthy of repudiation."<sup>59</sup> Fourier's emphasis was placed "upon efficiency that should be obtained when human impulses were given full sway and when society had been

56. New York Tribune, Dec. 23, 1842 59. Selections from the Works of Chas. Fourier, p127  
 57. Selection from the Works of Chas. Fourier, p 130 Chas. Gide  
 58. Social Reformers, D. Wagner p 215



so organized that the impulses of men were combined into a mechanism producing coincidence in every respect between individual interest and collective interest." 60

The Phalanxes, as the communities were called, were first formed at Sylvania, Pennsylvania in 1843. "The Sylvania Association is undertaken by intelligent and energetic workman, who disparing of obtaining the aid of men who have capital, have determined upon building up an Association by their own labor," so wrote Alfred Brisbane.<sup>61</sup> Two years later Sylvania failed, as did most phalanxes. Bitter internal conflicts over religious observances and over financial distribution contributed to its downfall.

Politically, this movement was intended to unite the workers so that if the chance arrived, they would be a strong enough unit to support the issues they felt were needed. However, none of the ideas "panned Out" and the workers lost faith.

The laborers demands in this era were not much different than in ordinary times:

1. Shorter hours
2. Land reforms
3. Reforms for women and children in labor
4. Court hostility curbed
5. Unemployment rectified
6. Lack of educational parity should be remedied
7. Ban on immigration
8. Ban on prison labor contracts
9. Free the slaves

The depression had made the worker realize the need for ample land reforms. Without employment the laborer felt that, if free land was available, he could move to it and raise the food

needed to keep his family alive. He objected to the government's policy of allowing the large corporations and the railroads to buy large tracts of public land, and in some instances re-sell it to a homesteader.

Despite the fact that in 1842 a court held for the first time that the right of a union to fight for increased wages was legal, the tradesman still wanted judiciary curbs invoked. The courts were very unfriendly to the workingmen, and times were bad enough without the employers having an ally in the courts.

Immigration into the nation was draining available jobs. In fact, the immigration laborer was so much more economical than the American laborer that employers were using means to rid themselves, in some industries of the American worker, in favor of the cheaper labor.

The laboring man was split on the slavery question. Some felt that the slave ought to go free, while others felt that he was in his right habitat.

Trade unions were slowly picking themselves up after the bad years of the late thirties. Jobs were scarce, and security unavailable. It was an unfortunate era for the American worker.

1841 - 1852

## 2. LAND REFORM

Mutual aid, socialistic, and communistic settlements had been organized, and then failed, as the wage system expanded. The worker once more put his ear to the ground, gave up the Utopian adherents and realized he would have to organize to protect his interest within the wage system.

George Henry Evans organized the National Reformers in 1845. He united them with the New England Workingmens Association and called a convention whereat they titled themselves the Industrial Congress. Mr. Evans wrote, "in our opinion the best method of putting an end to the feudalism and land monopoly in this state is to have the legislature pass a general law limiting the quantity of land," which any individual can possess<sup>63</sup>. Mr. Evans further stated, "what is mainly wanted is for the worker to have an assured chance to earn, and then an assurance of the just fruits of his labors."<sup>64</sup>

"A new party styled National Reformers composed of like materials and in good part, of the same men with the old Working Mens Party" had sprung into the picture.<sup>65</sup> This party was to be in partial opposition to both the Tammany and the Republicans. Mr. Greeley wrote, "the Republican party...was a homestead party. On this point its position was identical with the

63. Working Mans Advocate, Jan 20, 1845

64. Ibid May 2, 1846

65. New York Tribune Oct. 17, 1845

66. Political Science Quarterly V.24, p 468  
"Workingmen Origin of Republican Party"

that of the workingman."<sup>66</sup> Tammany, however carried the most influence with the worker and adopted their issues.

1. Equal rights
2. Free soil
3. Regulation of women and children in industry
4. Abolishment of prison contract labor
5. Anti-slavery legislation
6. Elimination of proper qualification for a juror
7. Cheaper postal rates

The Workingman's Protective Association of 1847 endeavored to advocate and push through the platform mentioned above. With the aid of Tammany, new cheaper postal rates were established.

The law requiring a potential juror to be a property owner was discriminatory.<sup>67</sup> It prevented the working class from serving on a jury, and this made it difficult for any working man to receive a fair and just decision.

The trade unions were in favor of a eight hour day for the women and children in industry. This was violently opposed because employers were exploiting the women and children to their own profit.

The recession period of 1847 again caused the trade unions to falter in their reorganizing, and the political activity of the worker was confined to a purely local basis.

67. New York Tribune, Oct. 10, 1848

1852 - 1856

The agricultural members of the new nation were now making their bid for recognition as a power in the political field. Their first aim was for adequate land legislation, to insure public lands in the United States from being sold to individuals representing corporations, instead of belonging to the people.

The Fugitive Slave law had been passed in 1850, and now the working man made that one of his issues. He was in favor of immediate repeal of that act, as it violated the equality for all policy of the laborer.

George Evans and his National Reformers were once again politically active. Evan's persisted that if adequate land were given to the common man, this would in time defeat the present wage economy and free the worker from bondage. "All of this can be obtained by a simple vote, if the working men throughout the country will unite", was the cry of Evans.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, this movement failed because the workers did not take the gamble and move West without some sort of security or money promised them. A worker said, "if we should, our places would have been filled by other workers from abroad."<sup>69</sup> This was intended to repudiate Evan's claim that if the workers would move West, the employment situation, as well as the housing situation, in the East would be alleviated.

68. Workingmans Advocate, Dec. 27, 1846

69. New York Tribune, Aug. 28, 1848

There was yet another movement going on in the nation at the same time. That was the movement to establish co-operatives. There were producer co-operatives in which a group merged and established common capital and materials and turned out a goods, whose profit was divided evenly among all contributors to the final product: Consumers co-operatives similar to the co-operatives we have functioning in the United States today, but these failed because the other merchants lowered their prices, and offered credit terms.

Politically, the field was left to the old parties, and to the new and aggressive farmers, now making their mark. The workers did have a few demands that they would desire to have enacted, but not through any concerted effort of their own. They were:

1. Curtailment of Immigration
2. Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850
3. Public land should belong to the people
4. Regulation of apprentices
5. Payment of the National Debt

The only significant action of trade unions during this four year span was to nationalize three of their trades; the printers, the stone cutters, and the hat finishers

1856 - 1860

## 3. PARTY ENDORSEMENTS

The recession of 1854 took its usual toll of the weaker trade unions. However, many of the larger unions survived the slow period, and continued to establish themselves nationally. Labor was in staunch protest to any political action by itself. The Republican party took over the demands of the laborer and also the votes. These were labor's demands:

1. Abolition of slavery
  2. Prohibit contract prison labor
  3. Increase wages
  4. Ban importation of foreign labor
  5. Land reforms and a Homestead Act
- Federal aid for internal improvements

Not all of labor took an anti-slavery stand. Some decided to let well enough alone, and allow slavery in the sections it now existed. Others felt the slave was better off than the starving factory worker.

The land reform question was of utmost importance to people. This was to be the exit from the wage system. Equal division of land was contemplated. "Vote yourself a farm", was the cry of the day.<sup>70</sup>

Locally, labor took one fling in politics, and that in the New York State gubernatorial election. Erastus Brooks had been nominated for governor, and his record evidenced that he was hostile to the worker. Trade unions publicized this fact, and advis-

70. Ibid, Oct. 27, 1856

71. Ibid, Oct. 20, 1856

ed that the worker defeat Brooks. This they did. Thus you see the fore-runner of the American Federation of Labor's non-partisan policy of "Punish your enemies."

Labor did play an important part in the election of 1856, through the Republican party. The Republicans had taken up the abolition of slavery theme, and had appealed to the Northern trade unions for support. Through the New York Tribune, the party showed that if slavery was allowed to continue, labor in the North would be reduced to the level of the slaves in the South.<sup>71</sup> The Republican party was unable to sway enough of the workers to their cause, and they lost the election. Buchanan, a Democrat was elected.

71. Ibid Oct. 20, 1856



CHAPTER III  
LABOR, LINCOLN, AND POLITICS  
1860 - 1864

The labor movement of the 50's had many advances on the economic front; wage increases, collective bargaining agreements, regulation of apprentices, and closed shop recognition. On the political front the trade unions had much less to show. Nothing in the 50's approached the Working Mens parties of the late 20's and early 30's. Even after the defeat of the Republican party in the presidential election of 1856, the worker stayed with the party as it continued to grow. The panic of 1857 had left its stigma on the trade unions, but they still had a friend in the Republican party. The worker as an individual was taking an active participation in the party. It was this expansion that nominated Abraham Lincoln as the candidate for President. Mr. Lincoln had said in 1859 that "free labor was the chief bulwark of America's freedom, and it was labor not capital which was the source from which human wants are mainly supplied."<sup>72</sup> Labor's demands were incorporated with those of the Republicans.<sup>73</sup>

1. Anti-slavery legislation
2. Economy in the departments of the government
3. Public lands open to the settlers
4. Shorter hours
5. Protective tariff

The workers were in favor of legislation, which wouldn't

72. Ibid Sept. 25, 1859

73. Ibid July 6, 1860

allow slavery in the territories just opened.

The Federal government had recently been scandalized by the public announcement of corruption and fraud in the various departments. The people were infuriated that their money should be used by some one else, other than the government.

The Knights of St. Crispin, the stronges of trade unions in existence at this time, was leading the fight for an eight hour day in the trades.

A high protective tariff was needed to give labor products made in America an opportunity to compete with foreign imports. It must be realized that the nation was just regaining its feet after the depression of 1857.

Carl Schurz, a staunch Republican, asserted that "the Republican party stands emphatically as the party of free labor... to man--his birthright; to labor--Freedom; to him that wants to labor--work and independence; to him that works--his dues."<sup>74</sup> These words fell on welcome ears in the trade unions. They got behind the Republican party, and Lincoln, and defeated the corrupt Democrat regime. About this one Republican stated, "we owe a debt of gratitude to the labouring men who gave us this victory."<sup>75</sup>

The workers tipped the scales to end the political domination of the Democrats who fostered an anti-labor attitude.

74. Ibid Oct. 27, 1860

75. Boston Journal, Nov. 10, 1860

1864 - 1868

Labor's contribution during the Civil War at the battlefront and in the rapidly expanding factories of the North, is one of the most inspiring chapters in American history. Only labor's subsequent cooperation and efforts in the two great World wars have overshadowed this effort. Labor was behind Lincoln, as the great president was behind it. He had on many occasions acknowledged their demands, and aided them in time of suppression.

Thousands of laboring men have marshalled themselves under the flag of the free, to maintain the integrity of the Government and vindicate the supremacy of law. The strong right arm of the working man is our country's sure defence in her hour of need.<sup>76</sup>

The war, and the subsequent increase in production and employment had given the unions an opportunity to fully recover from the depression of 1857. By 1863 the majority of the pre-depression trade unions were back on their feet.

Labor's function during the war years was of a business nature with minor emphasis on higher wages through collective bargaining; shorter hours, also through collective bargaining; and to strive for improved labor legislation.

The Homestead Act was passed in 1862. This law gave free land to actual settlers on government domain. It gave 160 acres. This law had induced many mill hands from the East to leave their jobs and seek this new life.

The Republican party again adopted the measures demanded by  
76. Ibid Dec. 27, 1864

labor. These measures were:

1. Amend the Conscription act of 1863
2. Raise the living standard
3. Amend the Homestead act
4. Improve the conditions of labor by females

The Conscription act of 1863 discriminated. It stated that if you could provide a substitute or pay 300. dollars, you would be excused from the draft.<sup>77</sup> This was a means of escape for the wealthy young men of the nation.

The Homestead Act, passed in 1862, had been one of the measures the worker and farmer had fought for, for many years, but now they wanted it amended, because as it stood "land given free could be purchased for \$1.25 an acre, within six months after settling."<sup>78</sup> This clause brought "dummy" settlers who represented large corporations. The "dummy" settlers stayed until the land purchased was held for six months, and then sold the land to a corporation, who in turn sold the land to some new settler for a fabulous price. It was this perversion the farmer and worker wanted remedied by amendment.

The cost of living was rising rapidly during the war years, and the wages of labor was about two years behind.<sup>79</sup> This they wanted remedied, either through politics or, if necessary, through an economic strike.

The working men formed the Workingmens Democratic-Republican Association. The purpose of this was to energetically campaign for the re-election of Lincoln. Its drive was so intensified

77. New York Tribune, June 9, 1864

78. Workingmens Advocate, Dec. 3, 1865

79. New York Tribune, June 9, 1864

that it is significant that numerous trade unions broke with non-partisan policy, and joined the Association in this campaign. This campaign was so successful that, with the Republican votes, Lincoln won every state but three.

CHAPTER IV  
NATIONAL LABOR UNION  
1868 - 1872

1. BEGINNINGS

Labor had just finished fighting a war. It had been a champion during the crisis, but now it realized that it needed solidarity to defend itself against the employers who already were organizing to attack and jeopardize the gains the unions had won during the war years.

On August 20, 1866 in Baltimore, a group of trade unions and some reform organizations, met and formed the National Labor Union. There was some 60,000 people in attendance from all parts of the United States. After electing John Hinchcliffe as chairman of the Union, it set about organizing its demands. Eight planks were decided upon.

1. Eight hour day
2. Greenbacks
3. Anti-monopoly legislation
4. Ban on immigration
5. Equal rights for working women
6. Abolish convict labor
7. Reduce the standing army
8. Establish a Department of Labor

Political action was voted upon and it was to be acted upon on a nation-wide basis. However, local political action was to begin immediately.

Regarding the eight hour day, which was the principle plank

of this Union, it was said, "whether you work by the piece, or work by the day, decreasing the hours increases the pay."<sup>80</sup> The Union felt that this reduction of the hours of labor a day would not only aid the individual worker, but would also alleviate the current unemployment crisis.

The Union was in favor of currency reform. The rate of interest for credit was high because there was a limited amount of money, deliberately kept so because gold currency was used, not in accordance with need, but as the bankers and lenders who monopolized it under the National Banking law decided. The remedy to this was plain. The amount of money was increased and thereby the rate of interest reduced. This would be done by the Federal government. They should issue all of the Greenbacks.<sup>81</sup>

The outstanding plank of the union platform was the demand for the establishment of a Labor Department. This had never been demanded before and demonstrated that the convention was gifted with some very far-sighted men.

The ban on immigration was demanded because there were so many discharged soldiers who were seeking employment. The employers were hiring the immigrants at a lower rate of pay, rather than rehire the soldier.

The entrance of the Union into politics didn't pass uncontested. Some of the unionists were strongly attached to an old

80. Perlman, Selig. History of Trade Unionism in the United States  
p 45

81. Working Mans Advocate, Aug. 28, 1866

party, and couldn't see why they should have to vote against their own party in favor of a new party. Others were just set against it, observing that "Politics meant corruption and fraud" and there is no reason for labor to defile itself by coming into contact with politics.<sup>82</sup>

After the convention had closed and made political history, Horace Greeley wrote, "the meeting, deliberations and conclusions of a Labor Congress representing laborers in the different sections of our country, mark an era in our history."<sup>83</sup> He wrote, "the convention has thoroughly represented the intelligence, education, and enterprise of the workingman in the Union, and its influence should be general and permanent."<sup>84</sup>

In 1867, the National Labor Union met for its convention in Chicago. Here it again discussed the formation of a national political party, but decided that it was not powerful enough to undertake this as yet. It had, in the year gone by, managed to enact in six states an eight hour day law. This was one of the bright spots of the year's labor. The political action, on an endorsement basis, had met with various results in the different sectors of the nation. The Greenback issue now became the important issue of the National Labor Union.

The conventioners were warned to guard against the influx of Socialism into the labor movement. The Socialist party, realizing that here was a potential political might, wanted to infiltrate and implant its demands and desires in the Union

82. Powderly, F. V. Thirty Years of Labor p. 77

83. New York Tribune, Aug. 27, 1866

84. Ibid



In 1868, the National Labor Union convened in New York City. It re-adopted the platform of 1866, with an amendment to the demand for shorter hours. Earlier in the year, Richard Travellick had culminated many long years of lobbying, by seeing Congress pass the eight hour day for Federal workers. They agreed that "standing armies are dangerous to the liberties of the people, and they entail heavy and unnecessary burdens on the productive industries and therefore should be reduced to the lowest standard."<sup>85</sup>

Regarding the political action issue, there were men who wanted political action immediately on a national independent basis; and those who felt that either basis would not result in harmony and they, in turn, advocated an adoption of measures that were political in nature, without suggesting as to how they enacted into laws. Education, they felt would in time bring their measures to the front, and make friends for them with men of all parties. Nevertheless, the convention ended without coming to any final decision. It did vote that "unless these principles are adopted by one of the two great parties... we advise the National Labor Union to put in nomination an independent labour candidate for the Presidency."<sup>86</sup> The convention officially adjourned after electing William Sylvis as its president in 1869-69. Mr. Sylvis said that by the time of the third Congress of the National Labor Union, the organization "had commenced to exert some political influence and politicians

85. The Boston Voice, Sept. 24, 1868

86. Working Mans Advocate, Aug. 22, 1868

were beginning to court its power.<sup>87</sup>

The Republican Party again adopted the majority of the measures put forth by the Union, and with its candidate, General Grant, won the Presidency.

87. Groat, George G. Biography of William Sylvis p. 75

1872 - 1876

## 2. DECLINE

The attitude of the Trade Unions toward political action since the Civil War had not been consistent. Some unions forbade their membership to introduce or discuss political questions. They felt that a dissention over the support of candidates could split the union. But all this did not mean that trade unions should remain aloof from politics. "Political activity by the worker was necessary, but it had to be conducted outside the union," so said the Working Mans Advocate.<sup>88</sup>

Now in 1870, the first organizational step toward a national Labor party was taken. A committee was selected to meet and decide on the date for the nomination convention to be held. The date selected was February 22, 1872 in Columbus, Ohio. The convention was held, and Judge David Davis of Illinois was nominated for the Presidency, and Governor Parker of New Jersey for the Vice-Presidency.

The old Republican party had split, making it two factions. The Union wanted to merge with the Liberal Republican, but the Liberal refused and nominated their own candidates. Judge Davis had welcomed the honor of being Labor's nominee, but when the Liberal Republicans nominated Horace Greeley as its aspirant, Judge Davis stepped down from his candidacy leaving the Union without a standard bearer. This completely frustrated the Union, with the results that they broke up into factions and nominated

88. Working Mans Advocate, Feb. 12, 1870

more candidates. The results of such a campaign is obvious.

The new Labor Party was decisively defeated in all sectors.

On the local front, organized labor had done well, especially in 1869 in Massachusetts. This party was formed only three weeks before the election, but campaigned so vigorously that it elected one of its candidates to the State Senate, and twenty-two to the Lower House, polling some 13,000 votes in the state.<sup>89</sup> This party functioned until 1872, when it split into two factions and with its remaining strength.

Even though the National Labor Union failed in its presidential trial, it had formulated a platform worthy of mention.

1. Greenback currency reforms
2. Ten hour day for women and children
3. Ban imported labor
4. Establish a Department of Labor
5. Pay the National Debt.
6. Public lands belong to the people
7. A protective tariff
8. Eliminate contract labor in prisons
9. Government regulations of railroads and telegraphs
10. Fitness should be the primary qualification for public office
11. Equal pay for equal work.

Repeal of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, under which China and the United States recognized the rights of its citizens to emigrate to the other country, was desired by the union so as "to eliminate the importing of servile labor for the sole purpose of tampering with the labor of the American worker."<sup>90</sup>

The Boston Evening Voice stated that "the practice of women and children working 15 hours a day is brutal and subversive of

89. Boston Voice, Nov. 10, 1869

90. Ibid., Feb. 26, 1872

the health, intelligency and morality of the nation."<sup>91</sup> This was one of the reforms that was advocated by the women who attended the conventions of the Union.

The worker was afraid that the railroads would obtain too much power and increase their rates of freight and transportation. This would bear unduly upon the producer or consumer, and that would be an injustice.

The plank to insist on personal fitness for public office, instead of political considerations was extraordinary for a political party. It was an issue worthy of enactment.

"Modification of the tariff so as to admit the necessities of life and such articles of common use as we cannot either produce or grow and to lay duties on articles of luxury and those which we have the raw materials to produce or grow," was advocated in the Boston Voice.<sup>92</sup>

"That, as Labor is the foundation and cause of National prosperity, it is both the duty and interest of the Government to foster and protect it. It is important, therefore, to establish a Department of Labor in Washington to protect labor's interest," so was it stated in an editorial by A. C. Cameron in the Working Mans Advocate.<sup>93</sup>

The National Labor Union collapsed after the fiasco of 1872, but in its platform and resolutions was the key to the condition of affairs of that day. These pioneers in labor reform were

91. Ibid

92. Ibid

93. Working Mans Advocate, Aug. 17, 1870

gifted with prophetic vision, for they forewarned the evil which menaced the Republic.

"The National Labor Union which had such brilliant prospects in the beginning of its career, was poisoned by Greenbackism and is slowly dying," was written in 1871 by Frederick Sorge.<sup>94</sup>

This was an ominous prediction that came true with the swan song of 1872.

94. Sorge, Frederick Copy Book of the American General Council  
of the International Workingmens Association

## CHAPTER V

INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION  
1876 - 1880

## 1. GREENBACKS

When the banking house of Cooke and Company closed its doors in September, 1873, the entire credit structure of the country crumbled and with it the majority of the unions. Of the Thirty National unions in existence in 1873, only eight survived in 1877. It was estimated that union membership fell from 300,000 in 1873 to 50,000 in 1878.<sup>95</sup> Lockouts, blacklists, legal prosecutions, and yellow dog contracts were used by employers to finish off" the unions. In a drive to retain the members, they still had, trade unions were quick to show "that in those places where the union still flourishes, wages are higher than where there are no unions."<sup>96</sup>

In 1873 the Industrial Congress, which was the economic remnant of the defunct National Labor Union, met in Cleveland and decided to stay away from politics, other than to endorse candidates who accepted their principles. It stated that it would not "deteriate into a political party...or a refuge for played out politicians."<sup>97</sup>

In 1875 a new party was beginning to arise. This was the Greenback party which was growing out of the old agitation, the Patrons of Husbandry. In Cleveland, on March 11, 1875 they held their first convention. This meeting was attended by farmers

96. Working Mans Advocate, Sep. 23, 1876

97. Ibid, July 5, 1873

and by labor leaders who now had no unions to head. They nominated Peter Cooper of New York as their presidential aspirant, and Samuel Cary of Ohio as the Vice-President nominee.<sup>98</sup> These men were to seek election on the following platform;

1. Immediate repeal of the specie payment act
2. A plan to relieve the industrial depression
3. Enactment of anti-monopoly laws
4. No land grants to be given corporations

The Socialist party was not in favor of supporting the Greenback movement, for they felt the policy was not for the worker but rather to the real estate speculator. They were correct in their refusal to endorse the party, because the campaign, conducted without funds and adequate newspaper coverage, managed to collect only 100,000 votes in the national election.

The Workingmans Party of the United States was founded in 1876. This party was primarily Socialistic in doctrine. It planned on obtaining favorable labor legislation for the working class.

The Socialist Labor Party represented the majority of the laborers in this election. They had a platform that appealed to all the workingmen.

1. Abolition of monopolies
2. Public ownership of the means of transportation
3. Public ownership of the banks
4. Weekly payment of wages
5. Abolish prison contract labor
6. Enact compulsory education law for children between seven and fourteen years. No child under fourteen to be allowed to labor
7. Direct payment of public officials, no fees
8. Establishment of workingmens cooperatives, with state aid to Workingmens undertakings
9. Repeal of the Burlingame treaty

98. Ibid. May 19, 1876



The establishment of workingmens cooperatives was a carry-over of the Socialists action in Germany. This was to be the solution to the wage-slavery policy of America.

The Burlingame treaty was in need of repeal, because the socialist felt that its original purpose was being perverted. "Coolies are being used as strike breakers," and "Coolies are breaking the American Labor movement," were two of the comments made in the Arbeiter Union.<sup>99</sup> The workers were really opposed to the immigration of the Chinese because they felt that "the living standards were so low that it would take a hundred years until they absorbed American civilization."<sup>100</sup>

The trade union members were suffering so from the hard times of this era that they had no ambitions of participating in political action. They were solely interested in some sort of legislation that would mitigate the depression. No collective action nor any full endorsements were used by labor in this presidential election. Rutherford Hayes was elected to the Presidency on the Republican platform.

99. Arbeiter Union, May 25, 1869

100. Ibid,

1880 - 1884

# 1. GREENBACK - LABOR

The terror which broke the great strikes of 1877 had taught the labor movement that living conditions couldn't be improved if the government was going to use Federal troops to crush labor's activity. Determined to nominate and elect men who would stand by them, the workers turned to individual political action. Worker parties sprang up all over the nation. Some of these began to merge with the Greenback movement. Economically the nation was still far from being on its feet. "How the unemployed mechanics and laborers got thru this winter, God only knows," was the comment made in the New York Tribune in 1878.<sup>101</sup>

The most grievous conflicts between employer and employees took place in July and August of 1877. This was the most intensive if not the most disastrous, series of riots which the country has ever witnessed. Most of these great strikes and their subsequent turmoil can be attributed to the Railroad Brotherhoods and the Railroad owners. President Hayes called out Federal troops to safeguard the rights of the citizens. It was a black era for the unions.

In 1877 the Socialist Labor Party established its mission "to propogate and establish socialism."<sup>102</sup> This caused its stick to rise among the German element of the workers, but it also caused its stock to descend among the other nationalities of the

101. New York Tribune, Feb. 7, 1878

102. The National Labor Tribune, Nov. 10, 1877

of the working class. However, the party couldn't make progress because it was a party divided against itself over the old issue; trade union action to the exclusion of independent political action. Chicago was the center of the factions, both the trade union faction and that of the independent political action. The independent political action faction won out, and the party set about forming its national party.

The Labor Reform party and the Greenback party met with considerable success in the various local campaigns. It was these election returns which speeded up the concept of a National independent political action, for both Greenback and Labor. A call was sent out for a "national convention of labor and currency reformers to be held in Toledo in February, 1878"<sup>103</sup> This call had been issued by D.B. Sturgeon, Chairman of the Greenback party, and signed by prominent Greenbackers. He stated:

the interest of the laborers, mechanics and small store keepers, real estate owners, clerks and carriers are identical in the issues now presented to the voters. Neither of the old parties dare come out in their platforms and advocate your rights as, against the mighty corporations. The leaders and managers of the great corporations are known to be retained councils and lobbyist for the great corporations which have, for the past four years controlled the legislature.<sup>104</sup>

In December the Greenback party wrote:

The national party as a factor in national politics dates in origin from the nomination at Indianapolis, on the 17th of May, 1876... the Honorable Peter Cooper as its candidate for the Presidency. In November

103. New York Tribune, January 12, 1878

104. Ibid. September 5, 1878

of that year, we polled for him 82,640 votes. The national party continuing the process of organization, in two years increased its vote to 1,260,000. This great increase in the national vote is unprecedented in the history of political parties...can any doubt that a party which has developed such great strength in two years, can in the next two--that is to say 1880--so perfect its organization as to elect the next President, with majorities in Congress.<sup>105</sup>

One hundred and fifty delegates, most of them from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois answered the call. Uriah S. Stephen, founder of the Knights of Labor, Robert Shilling, active member of the Knights, and Robert Trevellick, president of the National Labor Union for three years, were the prominent labor representatives. Robert Trevellick was honored with the temporary chairman.<sup>106</sup> The party decided on inviting Negroes to active participation and did so by stating "the newly enfranchised citizen of African descent are invited to join our party which upholds the rights of Free labor, and advocates the doctrine of free soil."<sup>107</sup> The convention set to work to form a coalition, which they named "the National Greenback-Labor Party." This is the platform that they advocated:

1. Repeal of the Resumption Act
2. Repeal of the Nation Banking Act
3. A graduated income tax
4. Abolition of paying wages in store script
5. Government control of corporate bodies
6. Banning of contract labor in prisons
7. Reduction of the hours of labor to eight
8. Equal suffrage to both sexes
9. Abrogation of the Burlingame treaty

After the publication of this platform, the New York Tribune printed "of course, all reasonable men can see that the Tol-  
 105. Ibid, Dec. 3, 1878    106. Ibid, Feb. 23, 1878    107. Ibid,<sup>Sept.</sup> 1878

edo resolutions mean Communism. The coming party is bent upon complete social and financial revolution."<sup>108</sup>

The demand for an eight hour day was a beginning of a united movement throughout the nation for the eight hour day.

Regarding Immigration, the Greenback-Labor Party held that:

"it is time that our working people should waken to the folly of this suicidal policy. It is all very well for us to boast that America offers a refuge for the oppressed of every nation, but it is hardly with such a character of universal benevolence that her own children should be the only ones forbidden to earn their bread in the manner which which seems best to them."<sup>109</sup>

The new party deferred their presidential aspirations until 1880, but now they started their offense on the local fronts. In Pennsylvania, and in New York there was dissention between the labor and the currency elements. The platforms of these states reflected the nature of the state. In states such as Indiana and Maine, the platforms were primarily financial and agrarian. In the states like Illinois and Massachusetts, the platform stressed labor demands, even though financial reforms dominated the platforms. The Indianapolis Journal stated "platforms which contained demands for labor, also contained denunciations of the 'red flag of Communism' imported from Europe which asks for equal division of property."<sup>110</sup> The Greenback-Labor party had to spend much time and money denouncing and proving that they were not "Reds" much less even a light shade

108. Ibid Feb. 23, 1878

109. Ibid, Apr. 22, 1880

110. Indianapolis Journal, Mar. 15, 1878

of pink.

In the Congressional elections of 1878, the high point of the movement was reached. Some 1,060,000 votes were cast for the new coalition which in turn put fifteen of their candidates into Congress. This delighted the party, and high hopes were expressed for the coming presidential election.

Also, in 1878 another significant element entered labor, that of the Knights of Labor. They had been active as a secret organization since 1869, but now they discarded their cloaks, and were to take an active part in the formation of American trade unionism. Terrence V. Powderly became the Grand Master of the Workman of the Knights of Labor in 1878.<sup>111</sup>

With the return of business prosperity in 1879 the labor movement began to revive and reorganize.

Powderly became the Mayor of Scranton, as a candidate of the Greenback-Labor party in 1878. This was met with great approval by the party, as it guaranteed the support of the Knights.

In 1880, the Greenback-Labor party held its nomination convention. Representatives of the Knights of Labor, California Workers party, Workers party of Kansas, The Eight Hour League, the Workingmens Union, and the Socialist Labor Party all attended. The convention was disorderly. Chairman Travellick couldn't keep the delegates in line, despite his huge number of sergeant-at-arms. General B. Weaver was the unanimous choice for President, and General Chambers of Texas was the Vice President nominee.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>111</sup>. Powderly, T.V. Thirty Years of Labor 1859-1889

<sup>112</sup>. New York Tribune, June 12, 1880

A vigorous campaign was waged, but it wasn't sufficiently organized among the workers. Weaver toured the South and spoke frequently.

On July 29, 1880 another labor unit, the Independent Peoples Labor Convention assembled in Sharon, Pa. They nominated and endorsed the Republican candidate, James Garfield and General Arth Arthur for President and Vice President respectively.<sup>113</sup>

The Republican party in the meantime had no ideas of letting the workingmens vote, which they had controlled for years, slip from their fingers. This was the first time that any third party had made such an aggressive drive in a presidential election, and the Republicans were worried. The New York Tribune took up the campaign, and stated, "The Republican party was first formed by the free labor workingman of the North to protect against the encroachment of slavery. It gave the country free homes for all, free schools for all, and a protective tariff." The Republican party gained a majority in both houses of Congress, it enacted a protective tariff." As to the candidate it was nominating, the Tribune said, "General Garfield began life as a laborer, and has risen by his own efforts, never forgetting the free workingmen."<sup>14</sup>

The very fact that a large party like the Republicans would make such an effort to prove why they were worthy of the worker's vote proves the fear they had for the Greenback-Labor coalition.

The election came and went, and that is just what happened to the Greenback-Labor party. They polled some 308,578 votes for

113. Ibid, July 30, 1880

114. Ibid, Oct. 26, 1880

General Weaver, and this defeat crushed and split the party.<sup>115</sup>

Fundamentally, the alliance of Labor and Greenbacks was always unstable. To the Greenbacks, labor demands were of little importance because the Greenback theory stated that financial reform would solve all problems. However the workers wanted more. They felt that this combination would make the government employers on some huge public works project, and therefore insure sufficient work. Maybe both of the elements were correct, but as it went, neither survived to see the results. Thus ended the first national threat to the reign of the "Old Parties" by a labor influenced faction.

115. Ibid, Nov. 8, 1880



CHAPTER VI  
MODERN LABOR MOVEMENT  
1884 - 1888

1. TRADE UNION POLITICS

The organization of labor during the early eighties was typical of a period of rising prices. It was practically restricted to skilled workmen who endeavored to wrest better working conditions from employers through other means than political action.

The Greenback-Labor coalition was now a thing of the past. Only in the South was there still some strength. Yet, its efforts had produced results. It had made the old parties more attentive to the demands of the common people. Numerous states had passed laws establishing a Bureau of Labor Statistics; laws ending the farming out of convict labor; laws setting up compulsory education and laws requiring payment of wages in lawful money.

On November 15, 1881 the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada was founded by the national craft unions which had survived the crash of 1873. This marked the beginning of the modern labor movement. This was to be a pure and simple trade union, allowing no political action. They stated that their organization "looks to the organization of the working class as a worker; and not as politicians. It makes the qualities of a man as a worker the only test of fitness, and sets up no political or religious test of membership." 116

116. Proceedings: 2nd Conv. Fed. of Organized Trade Labor Unions

Labor, through the Knights of Labor, the most powerful of the existing unions, set up the following demands for one of the "old parties" to adopt:

- 1 A National Bureau of Labor
- 2 Reduction of the hours of labor
- 3 Abolition of contract prison labor
- 4 Employers liability law
- 5 Prohibition of child labor
- 6 Compulsory education
- 7 Factory, mine and workshop inspection
- 8 Payment of wages in cash

Many of these demands were already in vogue in some of the states. It was the hope for enactment of these laws by states not having them that prompted the laborer to put it on the ticket.

Labor was now seeking a suitable party through which it could campaign for its demands. "The Greenback-Labor movement is dead," was well realized by the wage earner.<sup>117</sup> The Socialist Labor party had disintegrated from a national scale to being active on only a few local fronts, so this left labor with one alternative, to seek support through either the Democrats or the Republicans.

The Democrats nominated Cleveland and in so doing, the Chicago Tribune claimed, "the Democratic party, in nominating Cleveland lost 3,000 votes among the trade unionist in Chicago."<sup>118</sup>

The Republicans greeted this nomination with joy, and they in turn nominated Blaine and said, "The labouring man will elect Blaine and nothing can defeat him."<sup>119</sup>

The Republicans were wrong, as history has proven, and Cleveland became the next president.

117. Weekly Iowa State Register, Mar. 12, 1882

118. Chicago Tribune, July 17, 1884

119. New York Tribune, July 17, 1884

CHAPTER VII  
POLITICAL UPHEAVAL  
1888 - 1892

1. UNITED LABOR PARTY

A political upheaval was now forming among the workers. Many factors contributed toward it. There were the disastrous strikes of 1886; The wholesale conviction of union members of criminal charges of boycotts, conspiracy, intimidation, and rioting; the turning of public opinion against labor because of the Haymarket affair in Chicago; and the presence of a large non-wage earning class among the Knights of Labor which could only assert itself through political action.

The first step in that direction was taken in New York City where the Central Labor Union called a meeting of the Knights of Labor, Greenbackers, anti-monopolists, socialists, single-taxers, land reformers and a host of intellectual and professional men. There appeared at the meeting 402 delegates, representing some 50,000 members.

The socialists took the lead in forming an independent political party. It was decided by an overwhelming vote that such a course should be followed. The convention stated:

the rights of any body of workers to any separate political action is undenied and undeniable. On many accounts, it would be a good thing for the country if workers would attempt such separate political action...if organized labor goes into political action it will discover that this is the real desire of a majority of the laborers of the country.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup>. Ibid., Aug. 19, 1886

They deferred forming a campaign until the nomination convention to be held the next September. At this convention, the United Labor party nominated Henry George as its candidate for mayor of New York. In reference to its need for a suitable platform the convention decided " a genuine Labor party would strive for the elevation and defense of American labor through entire freedom of voting and honest counting of votes in all parts of the country."<sup>121</sup> However, the platform finally settled upon was one made up by the Henry George supporters:

1. Municipal ownership of water works, lighting and heating plants
2. Government alone should issue money
3. Reduction of the hours of labor
4. No child labor allowed
5. No convict labor allowed in competition with free labor
6. Government ownership of railroads and telegraphs
7. Abolition of conspiracy laws
8. The Australian ballot
9. A service pension bill
10. The single tax
11. Correction of the present political corruption

This campaign was one of the most spectacular in the history of the labor movement in America. Workers enthusiasm was at its highest pitch. They sensed victory. Campaign funds were happily and readily given. A special newspaper was started to combat the work of the four large Democratic presses already in operation. The labor paper cried out against the political corruption, while Hewitt, the Democratic candidate, emphasized the "robbery" of the single tax system of Henry George.

The vote was cast, 90,296 for Hewitt, 68,110 for George, and the Republicans candidate, Roosevelt, 60,000.<sup>122</sup> There was suf-

122. Ibid. Oct. 20, 1886

ficient ground for the assumption that George was counted out of thousands of votes.<sup>123</sup>

The party did not break up with this defeat as had been expected, but it expanded to take in the entire state. A state convention was held at Syracuse, on August 17, 1887. Now the conflict between the Socialist and George came out in the open. The Socialist were opposed to the lack of labor demands in the platform. The War was openly declared. However, George's popularity kept the majority of the workers behind him, with the result that the New York Tribune wrote, "Henry George and Dr. McGlynn grappled determinedly with the wild beast of Socialism today, and after a fierce struggle threw it out of the ranks of the United Labor Party."<sup>124</sup> The Socialist element, along with most of the German dominated unions, returned to New York, where they organized the Progressive Labor Party. This party lasted through the state campaign of 1887 and then collapsed.

The United Labor party nominated Henry George as their candidate for Secretary of State. This time he failed to poll 37,000 votes in New York City, a considerable drop from his 67,000 of the year before and he totaled only 72,000 in the state. The workers had stopped supporting the party. This was the end for the United Labor party. George abandoned the party and became an adherent of Cleveland in the 1888 presidential election.

The American labor movement itself was experiencing an impetus it had never felt before in its history. The Knights of Labor had swelled to 700,000 members, and the other trade unions

123. New York Sun, Oct. 22, 1886  
 124. New York Tribune, Aug. 19, 1887

to some 250,000. The Knights strike against the Missouri Pacific Railroad, part of the Jay Gould trust, had met with success, and this served as a stimulus for membership. T. V. Powderly, the Grand Master Workman of the Knights, issued this statement regarding his union, "the chief aim of the Knights of Labor is to educate, not only men but parties; educate the men first that they may educate parties and govern them intelligently and honestly."<sup>125</sup> The Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada changed its name to the American Federation of Labor. Samuel Gompers became its leader, and he announced that this was to be a pure and simple trade union, without any play in politics.

The Knights of Labor resented the growing membership of the American Federation of Labor and attempted to organize into its ranks the skilled workers. This was an inroad into the field of the Federation and they began to defend their ranks and stress their economic policy. The Knights attempted to show their might by conducting strikes against large employers, but they lost them with the subsequent loss of membership.

Labor vote for president was split in the election of 1888, because the United Labor Party and the other factions wouldn't unite. This caused most of the prominent leaders of labor to return to their own parties, and campaign for them. As a result, Harrison, a Republican was voted into office.

Thus another era that had looked prospective for labor dwindled into obscurity because of internal dissention.

125. Powderly, T. V. Thirty Years of Labor, 1859-1889, p280

1892 - 1896

## 2. PEOPLES PARTY

The American Federation of Labor was now battling on two fronts, the Knights of Labor whom they were defeating decisively, and the Socialist party. Defeats in strikes, depression in trade, a rapidly falling labor market, and court prosecutions were powerful allies to the Socialists. They were striving to convert the Federation from a mere economic organization to an economic political one, and to make it embark upon the sea of independent politics. Daniel DeLeon was the Socialist Labor Party's leader.

The Knights of Labor and the Citizens Alliance met in Cincinnati, Ohio and established the Peoples Party. At Omaha, in July of 1892, the Peoples Party held its first nomination convention. They nominated General Weaver for President and James Field of Virginia for Vice President. The platform was:

1. National legal tender
2. Free coinage of gold and silver at 16 to 1 ratio
3. Graduated income tax
4. Government ownership of railroads and telegraphs
5. Abolition of all land monopolies
6. Condemnation of the Pinkertons

On this platform and with the aid of a fine campaign, General Weaver polled 1,041, 527 votes.<sup>126</sup> This was a remarkable showing. Grover Cleveland won the election on the Democrat ticket. Regarding the fine showing made by Weaver, the New York Tribune wrote, "Modern tendency toward socialism...showed itself in the formation of the Greenback party, the Labor party, the Farmer party,

126. New York Tribune, Nov. 25, 1892

and finally the Peoples Party." 127 It was the old cry of "ism" when a new element made an impression with the people.

The Industrial Conference met in St. Louis in 1892. This group was composed of the Knights of Labor, the Farmer Alliance and other reform groups. They made the following demands:

1. We demand abolition of National banks of issue and as a substitute for National banks notes we demand that legal treasury notes be issued in sufficient volume to transact the business of the country, without damage or special advantage to any class or calling.
2. We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver
3. We demand passage of a law prohibiting alien ownership of land, and that Congress take prompt action to devise some plan to obtain all lands now owned by aliens and foreign syndicates.
4. We demand that all revenues, National, State, or County shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government
5. We demand a just and equitable system of graduated income tax.
6. We demand...National control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation.
7. We demand that Congress of the United States submit an amendment to the Constitution, providing for the election of United States Senators by direct vote...also the President and Vice-President by a popular vote.

Resolved: that this conference of the Industrial Organization demand that in each state a system shall be provided and faithfully executed that will insure an honest and accurate registration of all voters, a free, fair, secret, and official ballot and an honest public count.<sup>128</sup>

The Knights of Labor were still declining. Their strife with the Federation of Labor and the Socialists, plus their unsuccessful strikes and politics were taking their toll. Membership had declined from 723,000 to 259,518 in two years. In contrast the Federations membership was now up to 700,000. This was a switch,<sup>129</sup> one great labor organization bowing out to the one replacing it.

127. Ibid, Nov. 25, 1892

128. Ibid, Jan. 24, 1891

129. Ibid, July 10, 1890



## CHAPTER VIII

### AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR AND POLITICS

1896 - 1900

#### 1 POLITICAL PROGRAM

During the summer of 1893 the nation was rocked by another depression. This depression was to be the test of the strength and stability of the labor movement. The Knights of Labor had fallen to a membership of 74,000, but the A. F. of L. surged thru with its membership and large financial reserve.

The Democratic party now took up the banners of the workers. They formulated the following platform:

1. Establishment of a National Dept. of Education
2. Exclusion of Oriental Labor
3. Enactment of employers liability and safety laws
4. Limitation of use of injunctions in strikes
5. Federal Government should have exclusive right to issue money
6. Progressive income tax and tax on inheritance
7. Abolition of contract labor system
8. Equal pay for equal work
9. A legal eight hour day
10. Government inspection of mines and workshops
11. Government ownership of railroad, telegraph, and telephone
12. Initiative and referendum on all legislation
13. Free coinage of both silver and gold at a 16 to 1 ratio

The limited use of the injunction was a dire need of the unions who were attempting to recover after the disastrous depression had stunned them. The Pullmand strike in Chicago was an instance where the laboring man thought the courts were using the injunction too radically. The unions thought that they were entitled to at least a trial by jury for contempt cases.

Women were being underpaid for doing the same work as men.

This was occurring all over the nation. Employers were exploiting the women at the expense of the male worker.

The government in 1892 had passed an eight hour day act, applicable to the employees on public works, whether directed by the Government or under contract to the government. This the workers wanted for the trades also.

The Democrats promised to fight for protection legislation if they were elected. This legislation would be inspection of mines and factories, and enactment of liability and safety laws. The worker was becoming more conscious of himself as an individual, and realized the dangerous conditions he was working under.

The A.F. of L. launched its "Political Programme" preamble to the convention of 1893. These were the planks that the Democrat party adopted so swiftly for the campaign of 1896. Gradually the affiliates of the A.F. of L. gave their endorsement to this program. The unionist took to politics in the local area, and in the city elections of 1893, the labor candidates were soundly beaten. This came as a shock to the membership. However, Samuel Gompers and Adolph Strasser capitalized on this failure to warn the members of what could happen to their organization if such an attempt was made again. Gompers, in his address to the convention of 1894 said:

The industrial field is littered with more corpses of organizations destroyed by the damming influence of partisan politics than from all other causes combined...The American Federation of Labor has always maintained that the unions of labor are above, and should be beyond the power and influence of political parties.<sup>130</sup>

Strasser and Gompers then asked for a vote on the adoption of the Political Programme. By a vote of 1345 to 861, the convention struck out the preamble.<sup>131</sup> This sealed the fate of the move for an independent labor party in the Federation.

Even though the Federation had vetoed going into independent political action, its leaders stepped out as managers of candidates for election in the current political campaign. The union leaders publicly endorsed the Democratic candidates. In fact, Gompers himself did a good deal of campaigning for Bryan, the presidential nominee. Secretary McGrath of the Federation accused Gompers of acting in collusion with the Democratic headquarters. After a lengthy secret session, the A. F. of L. convention approved of Gompers' action.

The Peoples Party, in their convention, decided to write in Bryans name on their ticket.

The Republicans had put up their candidate, McKinley, and he defeated Bryan in the famous silver issue election by a plurality of 602,555.

The Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance was set up in 1895 by Daniel DeLeon in opposition to the Federation. This new alliance was to absorb all the activities of the Socialists. However, this new attack by DeLeon met with the same results as his past raids on the Federation, it failed.

The Knights of Labor were now finished. Their ranks were depleting, losing out to the powerful Federation. Still it must be noted that even if the Knights had failed in its struggle

131. Ibid

132. New York Tribune, Apr. 3, 1893

against management, its main contribution lay in its being the first organization in the history of American labor to educate the worker. Its mistake was its attitude that "the strike is the laborers rifle, and the boycott his bayonet." 132

132. New York Tribune, Apr. 3, 1893

1900 - 1904

The demand for an independent labor party was now confined solely to the Socialists. In the past the Socialists technique was to infiltrate into the large unions, and endeavor to "push" them into political action. This was to be the mechanism by which the Socialists would gradually convert the union to Socialism. Now the Socialist had changed their policy, and were going to oppose the trade unions and go out on their own, rallying the workers around them.

The American Federation of Labor had had an increase of 300,000 in membership. It had the total membership of 900,000.<sup>133</sup> Samuel Gompers commented, "it is noteworthy that, while in previous industrial crises, the trade unions were literally mowed down and swept out of existence, the unions now in existence have manifested not only the power of resistance, but of stability and permanency."<sup>134</sup>

The Socialist Labor Party convened in New York City, on June 2, 1900. This was the DeLeon faction of the party. They nominated Joseph F. Maloney of Massachusetts as their Presidential candidate, and Valentine Rimmel of Pennsylvania as their Vice-Presidential candidate. They re-affirmed the platform of 1886. However the party did poorly in the election, because of the wide split. The Socialist movement was not only unsuccessful in gathering the union's votes, but was unsuccessful in gathering its own memberships' support.

133. The International Year Book, 1900

134. American Federationist, Vol. 4 p 74

The Democratic party again heeded the demands of the trade unions, and accepted them into their platform:

1. Free coinage of silver
2. Abolition of private monopolies
3. Denunciation of the blacklist and opposition to government by Injunctions
4. Creation of a Department of Labor
5. Pensions to discharged sailors and soldiers
6. Strict enforcement of Chinese Exclusion Law
7. Reduction of taxes
8. The eight hour day law redressed

The silver question was still hanging over from the great campaign of 1896. The workers didn't have much of an interest in this issue other than it affected the national economy. They had their own private issues that they felt were more important. The use of the blacklist and the perverted use of the injunction were the issues high in the laborers mind. The employers were using these to a maximum. The Sherman Anti-trust act, which the unions felt would be an asset to them, backfired into their faces after the courts finished interpreting and regulating it.

The need for a Department of Labor was evident. With the labor movement gaining stability each day, a department was needed to regulate industrial legislation.

The Peoples party, which was then on its way out, convened at Sioux Falls, South Dakota and endorsed Bryan as their nominee.

Again that year, it was Bryan against McKinley and again McKinley won, this time increasing his plurality of 602,555 in 1896 to 871,513 in 1900.

1904 - 1908

A distinctly new period was emerging. Industrial prosperity was returning, and with it a rapid expansion of labor organizations. Only in 1886 had labor equaled the gains it was making now. These gains were far more permanent than the upheaval of the late eighties. In 1900 the membership of the Federation was 900,000, while in 1904 it had jumped to 1,670,000, an increase of 776,000.<sup>135</sup>

In 1903 the Sherman Anti-Trust law was being used against the unions in the Danbury-Hatter case. The usage was upheld by the Supreme Court. This was a disastrous revelation to the unions who hadn't realized that they came under the law. This served as stimulus the American Federation of Labor needed to decide to "load" Congress with their friends so as to have the "anti-trust law modified. Pressure was exerted against the Federation to go into independent politics, to rectify the legislation detrimental to labor, by political action, but Gompers said, "Labor has never yet formed parties or undertaken to form one, but what the control has been wheede out of their hads by a lot of faddist, theorists, or self-seekers, and thus perverted from its true labor interest and working class characteristic."<sup>136</sup>

The "friend of the worker" was a Democrat, and he supported the platform put forth by the Federation:

1. Modify of Anti-trust laws
2. Reduction of the Army
3. Effective eight hour law
4. Protection from infringing convict labor
5. Immigration restrictions and enforcement of present laws

135. Ibid, Vol. 4 p. 12

136. Address to Cigarmakers Union #144, NYC., Apr 24, 1906

The unionist had made the altering of the Sherman act his principle demand. Still, it was not only the unionist who realized that the use of the injunction in labor disputes was unjust. Judge Tuley of the Appellate Court of Illinois said, "If Congress has the power, it should put an end to government by injunctions by defining and limiting the power of the Federal courts in the use of the writ." 137

The wage earner took an active part in the Congressional elections in an attempt to elect the men he felt were friendly to his cause.

137. Chicago Times Herald, Sept. 19, 1897



1908 - 1912

## 2. NON-PARTISAN POLICY

The drift into politics since the 1905 caper differed essentially from that of early periods. It was amovement coming from "on top" not from the masses themselves. Instead of amovement by the city locals, as had been the case in the past, the Executive Council of the Federation was directing this movement. That the Federationist's leaders were able to force the desired planks from one of the political parties by holding out a vote of such uncertain value, is a tribute to their sagacity as well as a manifestation of the instability of the general political alignment in the nation.

On March 21, 1906, the Federation submitted to President Roosevelt and to Congress its Bill of Grievances. The bill listed the demands of labor:

1. Enactment of an adequate eight hour law
2. Elimination of the competition of convict labor
3. Releif from the perverted use of injunctions
4. The appointment on the House Committee of Labor of members friendly to labor
5. Restoration of the right of petition by government employee

The Bill was utterly denied and ignored, and Congress failed to grant any of the relief requested, so it became necessary for labor to appeal to its members to remind the Congressmen in the next elections of the rights and power of the worker.

Mr. Gompers took his platform into the camps of the two parties, Republicans and the Democrats. He wanted to see which would prove friendly to his demands. The Republicans set up their

platform, and regarding injunctions had this to say,

The Republican party will uphold at all times the authority and integrity of the courts, State and Federal, and will ever insist that their powers to enforce their process and to protect life, liberty, and property shall be preserved inviolate.<sup>138</sup>

This was in disagreement with Gompers' demand, so he next waited to see what the Democrats had to say. The Democrats proved to be more friendly, and readily absorbed his demands into their own. Gompers then stated, "American labor movement is not partisan to a political party; it is partisan to principle; the principle of equal rights and human freedom."<sup>139</sup>

In August of 1906, the A. F. of L. held its convention, and publicly announced that "We will stand by our friends and administer a stinging rebuke to men of parties who are indifferent, negligent, or hostile; and whenever opportunity affords, secure the election of intelligent, honest, earnest, trade unionist with unblemished, paid-up union cards in their possession."<sup>140</sup> The Executive Council formulated the non-partisan policy and issued the following recommendations:

- 1 Defeat all who have been hostile and indifferent of the demands of labor
- 2 If both parties ignore the demands of labor, a straight labor candidate should be nominated
- 3 The men who have shown themselves to be friendly to labor should be supported, and no candidate nominated against them <sup>141</sup>

Gompers announced that "Party politics, whether they be Republican, Democrat, Socialist, Populist, Prohibition, or any

138. American Federationist, Aug. 1908, p599

139. Ibid. Nov. 1908, p878

140. American Federation of Labor, Proceedings, 1906, p 29

141. American Federationist, Aug. p 495, 1906

other, shall have no place in the Convention of the American Federation of Labor." <sup>142</sup> The Federation published the following as its platform:

1. Redress of the Anti-trust and Interstate commerce laws
2. Enactment of an Anti-injunction bill
3. Effective eight hour law
4. Enactment of convict labor law
5. Enactment of Equal Rights for Seamen law
6. Creation of a Department of Labor
7. Women Suffrage

The present anti-trust laws were being perverted to work only against labor. They were were inverting and violating the guaranteed personal liberties of labor, as specified in the Constitution.

The present eight hour day law needed extension and alteration to remedy the defects, so as to be applicable today.

Small craft workers' sustenance was jeopardized by the infringing of convict labor. The product of the convict could be sold much cheaper than that of the self-supporting laborer, because of the difference in overhead and cost of materials. This was causing a slow strangulation of the small owners.

Seamen were in dire need for legislation that would give them equal rights with other workers. The laws passed in 1895 and 1898 only gave partial relief from the involuntary servitude of the seamen.

The Chinese exclusion law was a farce, for it wasn't enforced and violations were common. This was flooding the nation with cheap undesirable labor.

It was this platform that the Democrats were quick to absorb  
 142. American Federationalist, Aug. 1906, p 495

into their own. The Democrats had a few candidates whose record as a "friend" to labor was not good. To this the Federation had to say, "whenever both parties ignore labor's legislative demands a straight labor candidate should be nominated so that honest men may exercise their right to vote."<sup>143</sup>

Graham Taylor, writing in the American Federalist, said "Organized labor now puts up a united front in the political situation, such as it never approached in the history of American politics."<sup>144</sup>

The results of the election, however, failed to agree with Mr. Taylor's statement. The Republicans won easily, and they were quick to acknowledge that their victory made it clear that "there is in America today, no labor vote".<sup>145</sup>

The work of the Federation in 1906's Congressional election had not been in vain. The Employers Liability Act was passed pertaining to Congressional control, and regulation of common carriers regarding safety of employees and liability of employers

The Industrial Workers of the World was founded in 1905, from a number of diverse elements. Radical, left-wing unions composed this new opposition to the Federation. The IWW was going to organize the unskilled worker which the AF of L was not touching. Their political activity was conducted through the Socialist party.

143. Ibid, Sept. 1908, p530

144. Ibid, Nov. 1908, p850

145. Chicago Tribune, Nov. 10, 1908

1912 - 1916

### 3. BRIGHTER DAYS

The excursion into politics, away from their usual economic methods, by the Federation was a political defense mechanism. It was intended to defend against the "open-shop" employers and the hostile courts. The AF of L at Congressional election time, published in their organ, the American Federationist, the names of the Congressmen and their records on labor legislation.<sup>146</sup> This was utilizing their "Reward your friends, Punish your enemies," to the fullest. Fifteen men were elected to Congress, who held membership cards in the Federation. William B. Wilson, former Secretary-Treasure of the United Mine Workers, was appointed chairman of the House Labor Committee.<sup>147</sup> This election had proven to be the "day of reckoning" to the hostile Congressmen.

In 1912, Gompers again put labors demands before the two parties:

1. Elimination of the competition of convict labor
2. Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion act
3. Exemption from the applications of the provisions of the anti-trust law
4. Old Age pension
5. Safety and Welfare laws for employees
6. Women suffrage
7. Establishment of a Labor Department
8. Establish Public Health services nation-wide

The Republicans ignored the demands, and the Democrats welcomed them.<sup>148</sup> President Gompers, exhibiting the non-partisan

146. American Federationist, Sept. 1910, p746

147. Ibid. June, 1912, p460

148. Ibid. Aug. 1912, p620

policy of the Federation, urged the re-election of fifteen trade unionist, eleven of them Democrats, three Republicans, and one Socialist.<sup>149</sup>

The election of Woodrow Wilson, the Democrat candidate, was considered a great victory for labor. Labor now had an administration friendly to its demands. It had also elected seventeen trade unionists to Congress.

The eight hour bill was passed in 1912. This bill applied to workers on public contracts of over \$2,000. This had been pursued by the Federation for almost fourteen years. This was an outcome of the non-partisan policy.

The Lloyd-Lafollette Act was passed, giving workers in Federal Institutions the right to organize, providing they didn't obligate themselves to strike against the Government. This law was intended for postal employees, but was interpreted to include the other aspects of Federal employment.

The membership of the AF of L had jumped to 1,841,268 by this time, and appeared as if it were going to continue to swell.<sup>150</sup>

149. Ibid. July, 1912, p535

150. International Year Book, 1912

1916 - 1920

This was an era of "brighter things" for the labor movement. Its political activity was non-partisan. It had in office an administration favorable to it, as the legislation passed in those four years dictates.

In the Congressional elections of 1912, there were seventeen men put into office, who held cards in the AF of L. This gave the 63rd Congress a pro-labor theme.<sup>151</sup> In the elections of 1915, it was just a matter of re-electing the same men.

In 1913, the Department of Labor was founded. William Wilson was made the first Secretary of Labor.

In 1912, The Commission on Industrial Relations was established with Frank P. Walsh as chairman. This commission was delegated to investigate labors' unrest.

In 1914, the Clayton Anti-trust law was enacted. This law limited the use of the injunction in labor disputes, and provided trial by jury in contempt cases committed outside the court. It exempted unions from the Anti-trust law, as long as they acted unilaterally. This Clayton law stated concretely that labor is not a commodity. Samuel Gompers called this law the "Magna Charta of Labor".<sup>152</sup>

In 1916, the Adamson Act was passed giving to the Railroad Brotherhoods an eight hour day, with ten hours pay. They had lobbied for this act for years. Also, in 1915 the Seamen's law was passed, removing the last vestige of involuntary servitude from

151. American Federationist, Dec. 1912, p948

152. Ibid, Nov. 1914, p832

the laws of the United States.

The laborers demands, this time were fewer than they had been while an unfavorable party was in power:

1. Equal work deserves equal pay
2. Federal Child Labor laws
3. Workmens Compensation laws
4. Wage increases
5. Women suffrage

The Democratic party again adopted the demands of labor, and labor endorsed the majority of the Democrat nominees, with a result that they voted back into office and administration favorable to both.



CHAPTER IX  
WORLD WAR I ACTIVITY

1920 - 1924

1. NONPARTISAN LEAGUE AND FARMER-LABOR PARTIES

When the United States plunged into World War I, the problem of labor became a principle issue. American industry was spurred on by the war time profits, to wage a reckless battle for the available labor. The AF of L had already pledged itself to full support of the war. Samuel Gompers said, "this is labor's war."<sup>153</sup> It was organized labors task to see that no chaos occurred in the labor market. On March 12, 1917, almost a month before the war, representatives of 79 affiliated unions met and voted unqualified support to the government in case of war, and drew up a statement of labor's war policy. This statement expressed the desire that organized labor be recognized by the government as the representative of all wage earners, including those "who are not yet organized" and that organized labor be given representation in all agencies determining and administering policies of national defense.<sup>154</sup> The government accepted this proposal fully. In 1916, Gompers had accepted a position on the Council of National Defense. This was a move by the government to show labor that they were recognizing unions.

In June, 1917, in New York, labor leaders, reformers, and

153. American Federationists, May, 1916, p382

154. American Federation of Labor, Proceedings, 1917, p75

pro-war Socialists united to form the American Alliance for Labor and Democracy. This Alliance was formed to support the war effort, and to oppose the anti-war Socialists.

The National War Labor Board was formed in April of 1918. This Board publicly announced that it recognized the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively. This right shall not be interfered with by employers in any manner. This was the right that labor was seeking. In June of the same year, the War Labor Policies Board was formed. It was the duty of this board to lay down the principles to govern the relations between capital and labor in all adjustments made during the war. These principles dealt with collective bargaining and protective standards of health and safety. Both management and labor were represented on these boards. All of this activity made the Department of Labor one of the War centers of the nation.

The only union to give the government trouble during the war was the International Workers of the World. It conducted strikes and was a general all-around nuisance with its lack of good faith. Because of this anti-war position, the members were looked upon as un-American. Most of the leaders were imprisoned for violences of some kind.

However during the war years, labors demands for favorable legislation were few, because of the close cooperation between the Government and itself. In North Dakota in 1917, the Nonpartisan League was founded by A. P. Towley, a former Socialist. He organized the farmers on the basis of cooperation with labor

politically. This league spread to Minnesota where it operated through the Republican primary. Here it promised to support labor candidates for the State legislation. The league, recognizing the fact that the labor leaders of the Twin Cities understood politics merged with them. Together they set about organizing a state-wide unit, and opposing the Republican domination of the state.<sup>155</sup> The Federation of Labor in Minnesota fully endorsed the activity and informed its members to cooperate and work with the league. The combined labor forces managed to displace the Democrats from second place in the state, and elected 15 State Senators and 36 in the lowerhouse.<sup>156</sup>

The eagerness of the Minnesota Federation of Labor was not met with approval in the Executive Council of the Federation. Gompers, remembering the disastrous results of the National Labor Reform party of 1872, and the United Labor Party of 1886, cautioned the Minnesota Federation.

His warning fell on closed ears though, because in Chicago the Cook County Labor Party was organized. This gave Chicago a bona fide and united front in the economic and political fields for labor. Chicago was not the only place the mania spread to. State organizations were founded in Indiana, Michigan, New York, Utah and Pennsylvania. Gompers attempted to stem the tide by making a speech in New York before a group of labor leaders. This also was a useless effort, because the movement seemed to gather momentum as the presidential election year loomed.

155. St. Paul Pioneer Press, Sept. 22, 1918

156. Ibid, Nov. 11, 1918

On November 22, 1919 a national convention was held in Chicago. One thousand delegates attended, and the American Labor Party was founded.<sup>157</sup> Again in 1920, the convention was held in Chicago and set the formation of a platform, and the nomination of President and Vice-President nominees. The platform was:

1. All power to the workers and farmers
2. Democratic control of industry
3. Public ownership of utilities and basic natural resources
4. Government ownership of Railroads
5. Right of labor to an increase share in the responsibilities and management of industry
6. League of nations, built off the fourteen points of Wilsons
7. Steeply graduated income tax and inheritance tax
8. Prohibition of child labor under sixteen
9. A living wage to be paid to all who labor
10. Internationalism
11. Curtailment of Immigration

From the platform the assumption could easily be made that Marxian ideals were behind this program. The people themselves were not Socialists, but they did feel it was necessary to alter our system of government so as to have a powerful labor movement in the economic and political field. They had no aspirations to overthrow the capitalistic system and they didn't want a cooperative commonwealth. Nevertheless, they were Socialist in the same respect the the British Labor party was in those days.

By internationalism they felt that they could have a league of workers from all nations pledged and organized to enforce the destruction of aurocracy, militarism, and economic imperialism throughout the workd.

They nominated Parley Christensen of Utah and Max Hayes of Indiana as their Presidential aspirants.<sup>158</sup> The party was renamed

<sup>157.</sup> Chicago Tribune, Nov. 23, 1919

<sup>158.</sup> Ibid. July 16, 1920

the Farmer-Labor party. The new party conducted its national campaign, and polled only 275,000 votes. It was successful in South Dakota and Washington, in supplanting the Democrats as runners-up.<sup>159</sup>

The Socialist Party, in the meantime, had purged the majority of its left-winged members in an attempt to show its approval of the war effort. It lost some 10,000 members by taking this action. In May of 1920, it held its nomination convention, and nominated Eugene Debs, a prisoner in a Federal penitentiary at the time, and Seymour Stidman, as its Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates. The campaign was successful, more so than they had expected, and they polled nearly 1,000,000 votes.

In January of 1918, the Federation set up for the opinion of the political parties, their own platform:<sup>160</sup>

1. Abolition of all forms of involuntary servitude, except punishment for crimes
2. Unrelenting protest against issuance of injunctions in labor disputes
3. A work day of not more than eight hours, in the 24 hour day
4. Release from employment one day in seven
5. Abolition of contract system on public works
6. Municipal ownership of public utilities
7. Abolition of sweat shop system
8. Liability of employers for injury to body, or loss of life
9. Sanitary inspection of factory, workshop or mine
10. Nationalization of telegraph and telephone
11. Passage of anti-child labor laws in states where they don't already exist
12. Women suffrage co-equal with male suffrage
13. Initiative and referendum and Imperitive mandate and Right of Recall

The Democrats accepted the platform again, but not with the enthusiasm that they had in the past, because labor, after doing

<sup>159.</sup> Ibid, Nov. 22, 1920

<sup>160.</sup> American Federationist, Jan. 1918, p33

a superb job of aiding the war effort, turned around in 1919, and had strikes in the steel and coal industries, plus the Seattle general strike. More men were involved in the strikes of 1919, than in all the strikes the next six years. Public opinion was now against the workers, and the Democrats were afraid to endorse and absorb the Federations demands too heartily.

The results of the election bore out the Democrats anxiety, as the Republicans once more regained the Presidency, electing Warren Harding.

CHAPTER X  
PROGRESSIVE CAMPAIGN  
1924 - 1928

Impatient with the non-partisan policy of the American Federation of Labor and with its reluctance to engage in any political action; and weakened by a series of adverse Supreme Court<sup>161</sup> decisions, numerous trade unions were convinced that a labor movement devoid of political mindedness was inadequate to meet the problems confronting it in the post-war era. They felt that a manifestation of labor's political strength would have a wholesome effect upon both judiciary and legislators. A few of the state organizations, remaining from the failure to found a national Farmer-Labor party in 1920, had still maintained their identity and continued to agitate for a national party that would have a relation to the trade unions roughly comparable to that of the British Labour party to the trades of England.

The Minnesota Farmer-Labor group was the strongest of the remaining organizations, and it had steered clear of left-wing internationalism. In 1922, the non-partisan league had merged with the Minnesota party, and had elected Henrik Shipstead to the United States Senate; and in 1923, had put Magnus Johnson in the Senate. This was the mark of strength that the labor movement was seeking.

161. ASF vs Tri-City Trades 275 US184 1921  
Truax vs Corrigan 275 US312 1921  
Duplex vs Deering 254 US443 1921

On another front, The Railroad Brotherhoods sought the aid of the Federation, and the now purged Socialists, to form a congress on political action. On February 20, 1922, the Conference of Progressive Political Action was founded.<sup>162</sup> The CPPA took its first political action in the Congressional elections of 1922. They met in Chicago and agreed to support candidates favorable to labor. The results of this first action was satisfactory to most of the unions. However the Socialist were again pushing for an independent labor party.

In 1924, with the new stimulus of the Farmer-Labor party of Minnesota and the Chicago Federation of Labor, the CPPA awaited the nominations of the political parties.

Labor had been successful in having twelve labor legislative laws passed which would remove the stigma of the worker and improve his status. They also managed to defeat sixteen laws that would have been detrimental. Thus labor was taking an active part in politics.<sup>163</sup>

On July 4, 1924, the Progressive Party held its convention in Cleveland and nominated Robert LaFollette as its presidential candidate. LaFollette selected Burton Wheeler of Montana as his running mate.

The Republicans nominated Coolidge as their candidate, and the Democrats decided upon Davis. The AF of L had put its platform before the two parties and met with no acceptance. "Both the Republicans and the Democrats have flaunted the desires of labor

162. Chicago Tribune, Feb. 26, 1922

163. American Federationist, Feb. 1924, p287



the Republican convention in an arrogant manner; the Democrats by the evasiveness which is the customary mark of insincerity."<sup>164</sup>

The CPPA now stepped out and endorsed the candidate of the Progressive party. They felt that this platform and ideals was the only one favorable to them. The Progressive platform:

1. Break up the private monopoly system
2. Tax excessive profits, stock, dividends, and impose a sur-tax on swollen incomes
3. Revise the foreign policy
4. Reorganize the courts and prevent the Supreme Court from deciding laws of Congress unconstitutional
5. Repeal the Esch-Cummins law
6. Protective labor legislation for women and children
7. Government regulation of the coal industry
8. Direct election of the President and Vice-President of the United States
9. Improve and raise the wages and working conditions
10. More Government aid to farms
11. Public control of Federal Reserve System

The Progressives favored the payment of a soldier and sailor bonus from the excess profits tax. They also stated that only the oil imperialist, financial imperialist, and international bankers benefit from the present foreign policy, and that it should be remedied so that the common man could benefit also.

"We want a foreign policy to bring about a revision of the Versailles treaty in accordance with the terms of the treaty. It should abolish conscription, reduce army, air, and naval armaments."<sup>165</sup>

The plank advocating the reorganization of the courts was a popular one with the union man. The plank demanded the abolition of the use of injunctions in labor disputes. The Clayton Act passed in 1914, and turned out to be an empty shell as far

as benefit to labor was concerned. The courts were more hostile

to unionism now, than before the Act.

The American Federation of Labor now had no way to turn. Its demands had been ignored by both parties, and its rank and file was urging endorsement of the Progressive ticket. The Federation's Executive Committee endorsed LaFollette's nomination with reluctance, and, without a doubt, a little regret. Gomper's made it clear that "Pressure from the rank and file spurred the endorsement, but also that the Federation was not committing itself to, or identifying itself with any group supporting LaFollette."<sup>166</sup> In the American Federationist he wrote, "This alliance with LaFollette and his other supporters is only for the present election."<sup>167</sup> LaFollette made it clear that "his movement was not a third party movement, but an independent one."<sup>168</sup> Independent movement, or third party movement it didn't influence the results. LaFollette polled 4,826,471 vote and 13 electoral votes.<sup>169</sup> It was estimated that one out of every six voted for LaFollette.

The Federation and the Railroad Brother-hoods were quick to cleanse themselves of the former endorsement. The Federation was unanimous in their re-endorsement of the tried and true non-partisan policy. The Railroads Turned their attention to reaching an understanding with management. Both the owners and the union were disgusted with the Railroad Labor Board of 1920, and wanted readjustments made.

<sup>166</sup>. American Federationist, Sept. 1924, p 707

<sup>167</sup>. Ibid, Sept., 1924, p 707

<sup>168</sup>. Ibid, Sept., 1924, p 707

<sup>169</sup>. Ewing, G. Presidential Elections p 99

The demonstrated weakness of the LaFollette movement as compared to the pre-election estimates of all sides, not only retarded the development of the so-called third party movement, but it also completely eliminated the immediate possibility of the growth of a mass Farmer-Labor party of the industrial workers and poor farmers.<sup>170</sup>

170. American Labor Year Book, 1925

## CHAPTER XI

### STALEMATE

1928 - 1932

This was an unfriendly economic and political environment for organized labor, and it lacked adequate outlets for response. Memberships tumbled and internal disorders were hampering proper procedure. Also, labor had lost one of its greatest members when on December 13, 1924, Samuel Gompers died. The CPPA convened in February of 1925 and voted to liquidate itself.<sup>171</sup>

In these days of Coolidge capitalism, labor had little to say. The fact that the labor unions had failed to set up legal safeguards in case of a depression was ample proof of their political weakness. The American Federation of Labor set up its own demands, but did not present them to either party. They merely set them out for anyone to absorb:

1. Adequate housing
2. Old age benefits
3. Respect the rights and privileges of labor
4. Anti-prison labor legislation
5. Curtail the hostile courts

One of the bright spots of this era for labor was the passing of the Railway Labor Act of 1926. However, this was accomplished by the joint action of the Railroad companies and the Railroad Brotherhoods. This law recognized labor's right to organize tin the Railroad industry.

The remnants of the old CPPA endorsed Alfred Smith as the  
<sup>171</sup>1. New York Times, Feb. 23, 1925

Democrat candidate for President. The Republicans nominated and elected the former Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover. In this election, labor played no part at all.

## SUMMARY

The American labor movement has swung between pure industrial and political action since its birth, but on the whole its political and reformist behavior has outweighed its activities in the economic field. In the early years the movement was political. Pure and simple trade unionism played only a minor role. After the panic of 1837, the utopian theories invaded and the political aspect faded. The return of industrial prosperity brought forth the nationalization of trade unionism. Politically, labor was still only advocating reforms, taking no action. Through the Civil war period, labor and the government cooperated fully, and this amounted to a party endorsement by labor. The National Labor union of 1866 was the successor to the trade associations of the thirties. Its organization, policies and final dissolution reflected the new nation-wide problems brought on by the advent of railroads, telegraphs, and paper money. Its endeavor to regulate immigration brought to light the American workers recognition of international competition. The National Labor Union had many "firsts" in its brief career. It was the first labor union to welcome the negro: the first to have a strong effective lobby in Washington and the first to drive for a Department of Labor. The Knights of Labor was the next labor group to act politically, although it never determinely attempted it as an independently political machine. It always acted through endorsement, or at

times it colluded with other groups to seek its demands. The United Labor Party was the next influential political move. This was however, only restricted to one state, New York. Here it met with success, defeat and disbandment. The American Federation of Labor was the next on the scene and was the most business minded and the least political of the all. Except for their brief excursions into politics in 1893, 1906, and 1924 the Federation adhered to its tried and true non-partisan policy. The only remaining spearhead by labor into politics was its full endorsement of LaFollette in the 1924 presidential campaign. This was not restricted to any particular labor group, but was a nationwide effort.

The trend through the years toward industrialism is obvious. Politics in the United States has always been bad medicine for labor, not because there is any fundamental or necessary antipathy between labor and politics, but because America and American labor are what they are.

The attempts at formation of an independent labor party have always met with obstacles that led to its failure. Some of these obstacles were:

1. A change from industrial depression to prosperity
2. Legitimate internal dissention
3. Illegitimate internal dissention
4. Activities of the open enemies of the party
5. Inexperience of the legitimate leaders in the matter of selecting candidates and running a political party.
6. The adoption of some of its most important and popular demands by one of the old party

As to the likelihood of a formation of a labor party now, I feel this is improbable because of three barriers that the

party would have to overcome: 1. Tradition. America is accustomed to the dual party system and our occasional third party movements. This familiarity would relegate the labor movement to a third party category and once this was attached to it, it would be difficult to become anything else. The term "Socialistic" would immediately be associated with any labor party and would be subject to the strong remarks and opposition of the major newspapers. 2. Complex Modern Party Machinery. Money and time are the essentials of a political party. Money is needed to finance; time is needed to give it prestige. The rare ability of leading a labor party would be difficult to locate. 3. Old Party Loyalty. The only way a voter can be obtained is to draw him from one of the old parties. This is a strong affiliation, and one hard to vie against. The present party leaders have great skill in making appeals, especially to a workingman. Unfortunately for any labor party plans, workingmen don't think alike outside of the problems of the shop.

As John Mitchell states in his book, Organized Labor,

there is no doubt in my mind that the purposes of workingmen can better be attained by the formation of a solid group of men united in their political aspirations and their political demands, but not committed to the policy of forming a third party, than in any other way.

This is still the thinking of the majority of the present labor leaders. As long as that majority prevails, the Federations policy of non-partisan endorsement will dominate the American labor's political action.



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